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HONOR CARMICHAEL.

A STUDY.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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THE SECOND VOLUME.

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HONOR CARMICHAEL.

CHAPTER I.

STEPHEN'S IDEA.

"Ah, think of how we looked, and what we said;
Laugh as I laugh; your laugh is sweet to hear,
Love was our sovereign then rose-garlanded."

PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

STEPHEN and Honor walked together, side by side. Gladys and her father went flitting on ahead. They went past the old grey church on the hill, and down through the narrow slanting streets towards the Rue Bon Secours. They walked fast, for it was near tea-time, and Gladys

gave the step. The other pair loitered a little, I am afraid. But for the strong, salt-tasted air, and the bright-eyed, merry-faced people who clattered about the street, and stared at them as they passed, they might all have been back again in St. Mark's Road.

To Honor it was like a dream; only she did not know which was the dream, the past or the present. She seemed to be walking on air. She was breathing in happiness and love; but she was not conscious of either. It was one of those rare, strange, tremulous moments, when one is almost afraid to count up one's treasures, lest they should burst like bubbles at a breath.

"I must look out for a lodging. I only came by this afternoon's boat," Stephen was saying, in his dear, delightful voice, as he went swinging along beside her in his own old way, with one hand in his pocket and the other

left free for any emergency. "And I should like to get an Oriental master, if I can. Perhaps your father might be able to find me one? I spoke to him about it as we came up the hill—and I spoke to him about something else, too, Honor."

"Did you—did you?" she cried, and her eyes seemed absolutely to dance with delight. "And what did papa say?"

"He said—well I am not quite sure what he said, or whether he quite understood what I said. We talked a little about India, and he asked me how long I meant to remain there. And then he said something about that friend of yours over there—told me she was pretty, or clever, or something of that sort."

Honor felt rather disappointed. She had made to herself a picture of her father hearing the news. He was to look surprised at first, then perhaps a little sorry at the thought of losing her, and

then, oh ! so glad to welcome Stephen as a son-in-law. She had looked at this picture over and over again. But Stephen's description was not in the least like it. It was humiliating to come in thus, between a geographical topic and an everyday remark about her own friend. She would not think about it, however. She put the thought away from her with a thrill, as if it were a snow-flake she was shaking off her cloak. There should be no clouds before her sun, no snow or rain, either, in her summerland to-day.

"At any rate, I have done what I ought to have done," said Stephen, in an explanatory sort of voice. "And I will not say much more, my prospects being still so uncertain. The next Indian mail will not be in for a fortnight, and perhaps the letter will not come even then."

"Not come then?" repeated Honor.

"Oh, Stephen, perhaps—" and then she stopped short suddenly, and crimsoned all over.

Stephen Aylmer knew what she was going to say. "Perhaps it would never come at all." And then she would be glad.

It was very hard upon these lovers that the shadow of parting should be thrown so immediately over the sunshine of their meeting. Stephen could not give up India, even for Honor's sake. He had made up his mind, and he meant to stick to it. What else could he do? He had no profession, no prospects; no friends, except his uncle, Sir Henry Aylmer; no fortune, except a paltry £400 a-year; and what could they do with that? No, India was the place for him, and to India he meant to go.

But at the same time he was not unsympathetic, and he had not known Honor all these years for nothing. The

pain of parting would be intense. He knew that. It must be so. But he thought she rather exaggerated matters; as he, perhaps, was disposed to underestimate them. It was not her own pain she thought of so much, as the loss she would be to her father and sister.

How would they get on without her? And who would do this and this, and that and that; knowing their everyday ways, and guessing and gratifying their desires before they knew them themselves. This was Honor's thought at that exact moment; and Stephen knew it. She did not put her thought into words, but Stephen longed to answer her in words. It was so absurd, on the face of it. Why anybody could do the things Honor had done—a servant—a governess. Gladys must have a governess soon. There was old Pincock, for instance. She would be delighted to give up her school and go and keep house for the Vicar. Why, she

might—she understood the Vicar and his ways so well—she was not bad-looking either, nor so very old, after all; not that *that* would signify to a man of Mr. Carmichael's tastes; at which simple but sublime solution of all doubts and difficulties, Stephen laughed aloud.

"What is it?" asked Honor, whose mind had been travelling too, but who had not arrived at any mirthful conclusion. "Do tell me what you are laughing at."

But Stephen declined to tell her. "A brilliant idea had just struck him," he said, "but it required maturing. He could not divulge it just yet. In the meantime, had Honor heard lately from Miss Pincock?"

Honor was beginning to explain how she had not written lately; it was her own fault, she had been busy, etc., and was going on to ask after all her friends in London, when to her unmitigated as-

tonishment she discovered that they were entering the Rue Bon Secours, and that Gladys was already flying back towards them.

"Tea—tea!" cried the child, who was still a great way off. And then, as she came nearer, she glanced at Honor, and said—"Why, where are your gloves, Honor? And what have you done with your parasol?" A most precise person in matters of dress was Gladys.

Honor was conscience-stricken. She must have left both these articles in the Avenue Mont St. Michel, and neither she nor Stephen had discovered their absence till that moment.

"You cannot go back for them now," cried Gladys, fancying she saw symptoms of such an inclination on her sister's face. "It is tea-time, you know."

"I will fetch them for you, afterwards," says Stephen, smiling. And then they all go in to tea.

Tea again in the Chaplain's room. I am really ashamed to introduce you to another feast there. You will think my friends the Carmichaels not only spent their own time in eating and drinking, but also kept a sort of "house of call for wayfarers;" as a certain hospitable house in a certain London square, with a suggestive name, is well christened.

But this was a tea above all teas, and deserves to be recorded. How Stephen ate and drank, devouring a skinny-legged chicken all by himself, and murdering innumerable French words, to Gladys' amusement and delectation. How he admired everything, from the thick white china cups, which he declared held no more than a thimble, to Rosaline's high white cap, as she came clacking into the room, staring at the *beau Anglais*, and wondering at his prodigious appetite. How Gladys laughed till she choked, and Honor till the tears ran down her cheeks.

How even Mr. Carmichael looked up from his book more than once, and smiled benignly at them; and the people in the street outside, stood still now and then, and wondered what was going on within.

All these things Honor remembered in after years, and would tell you with varying accuracy how many of those gigantic cups of tea Stephen drank on that occasion. Ten, I think, was the number started with; but it grew as the years grew, and on one occasion I remember hearing it gravely stated to have been nineteen. This was contradicted by some one present, but the original statement that there never had been such a tea before or since remained unopposed. It was a feast for the gods, and the gods were present—Cupid and Psyche, at any rate.

Cupid was certainly not superior to the mortal viands placed before him, but seemed to find them very much to his

taste. Psyche, on the other hand, fed literally as the gods feed. She poured herself out a cup of tea, she crumbled a piece of toast on her plate; but she fed on love, and drank in happiness. And a most delicious repast she found it.

"I do not know that I admire that friend of yours very much, after all, Honor," said Stephen, suddenly, during a little pause. He had been peeling a peach for Gladys, and popped it down on her plate as he spoke.

The child looked up and laughed, and expressed her gratitude to Stephen by ably seconding his remark.

"She is just like a cat," she said, in her pouting, baby way. Honor laughed too.

"Have you been thinking about her ever since?" she asked, archly. "What, more tea? Pass your cup, then. I think I can squeeze out a few more drops from this most long-suffering teapot."

Mr. Carmichael did not laugh, however,

though he looked up slowly from his book.

"I am afraid you are growing rather pert, Gladys," he said, gently. "As for Miss Murray, I should hardly have thought you had time to judge of her merits, Aylmer. She appears to me to be a person of great intelligence, and as handsome as she is clever."

This was a long speech for Mr. Carmichael to make, and Stephen and Honor looked at each other in some surprise. He was certainly rather *distrait* to-day. Perhaps his book did not interest him. Perhaps (this was Honor's explanation) he was thinking over some news he had heard that afternoon.

"I certainly had not time to judge of Miss Murray's intelligence, sir," returned Stephen, quietly. "As for her beauty—when—" and the young fellow stopped suddenly, and began to laugh again, as he had laughed in the street a little while ago.

Mr. Carmichael pulled his book back before him with an impatient movement. He resumed his reading. The manners of the rising generation were certainly not pleasing.

"What is it, Stephen?" asks Honor, laughing too. There is nothing so infectious as laughing. It beats scarlet-fever and yawning all to nothing. "Have you another brilliant idea?"

CHAPTER II.

ANDROMEDA.

"Evermore
The young life comes, bound to the cruel rocks
Alone. Before it the unfathomed sea
Smiles, filled with monstrous growths."

LEWIS MORRIS.

MEANWHILE, in the Avenue Mont St. Michel, another interview was taking place between another father and daughter.

Colonel Murray was still standing by the window when his daughter came in again, with her wind-blown, tumbled hair, and great dilating eyes. She began tidying the things that lay scattered about

on the floor; or rather she imagined she was doing so, after a method of her own. Mademoiselle Madelon was of a different opinion, when she came in an hour later.

"So you have picked up some new friends, Valentine?" said her father, turning round, and looking at her. He held the little Book of Hours in his hand, and had evidently been glancing through its pages. But he re-clasped it now, stroked it gently, and placed it in his pocket in an absent sort of way.

"Yes, father," replied Valentine, slowly, "I have picked up some new friends, as you say—or rather they picked me up, I think. The girl did, out of the sea, at any rate."

"Who are they—what do you know of them?" asked her father.

"I don't know much; I only know that they have been very kind to me," answered Valentine, with some warmth,

but speaking rather unwillingly too. It was not a subject into which her father would be likely to enter sympathetically. "They are quite different from any other people we, or, at least, *I* have ever met before; so much so, that, at first, I almost tried not to know them; but it seemed a sort of fate that I should do so."

Colonel Murray looked at her again keenly. Was Valentine beginning to find out anything amiss in her own way of life, he wondered?

"You do not ask after your other fate," he said, abruptly, after a pause.

Valentine was sitting on the floor with one of the little cotton frocks on her lap. There were some bits of lace on the frocks which she had begun to tear off. She waited till she came to the end of one of the bits; then she looked up and said coldly:—

"I suppose you mean Graf von Reiche-

nau. I hope he was well when you left him?"

"He was quite well when I left him," replied the Colonel, coldly too. "And you will soon have an opportunity of judging of his state of health for yourself. Graf Otto will be here in three weeks' time, Valentine."

Another little frock had been taken up and begun upon. Snip, snip, rip, went the lace. It was of an older, more delicate kind, perhaps, than the other. It came to pieces in her hands. She went on pulling away at the threads, however. Would she speak when she came to the end of that bit? The Colonel stood watching her. A curious determined look had grown into both their faces.

"You do not seem much elated by my news," said the Colonel, sardonically, but speaking a little anxiously, too. It was not the first time he had done

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battle with his daughter, and he had not always come off victoriously. She was altogether unlike other women he had known, who would shake before his anger like a leaf in a storm.

The truth was, she resembled himself. It is always curious to observe the manner in which kindred dispositions act upon one another. The most common result is a chronic spirit of contradiction; sometimes it begets an invincible antipathy; rarely, very rarely, does it produce sweetness or sympathy. I have known two sisters, absolutely identical in character, appear totally dissimilar when in each other's company. Apart, their views on all things were as twin thoughts; together, as sworn foes. Had they resembled each other less, their natures would probably have fitted, the one into the other, like pieces of a dissecting puzzle. At it was, they merely stood one on the top of the other, angle over

angle, curve under curve. What did it matter which was uppermost? An acute observer might indeed remark that the stronger character of the two (there are degrees among dwarfs, as among giants) would usually take up the weaker position. The weaker character would, as a rule, be the foremost one, looking like a martyr, singing away to itself like an angel of sweetness and forbearance. The stronger one lies underneath, smothered in silence and suppression.

But people in general do not take note of these subtleties. In this world, at any rate, he who cries loudest is soonest listened to, not he who most deserves to be heard.

Neither Valentine nor her father, however, had begun to cry out as yet. The girl sat on the floor, still and silent; pulling away at her lace, and glancing up now and then with eyes as deep and grey as smouldering embers. Her

father stood against the table, glowering at her.

Suddenly he threw down upon her hands a little shower of bank-notes and gold pieces.

"That is for your *trousseau*," he said, abruptly. "You had better set about it at once. Old Madelon can go with you to the shops. She can pay Madame Pulliot's rent, and spend the rest on your finery. Only see that you get a handsome *trousseau*, one befitting the rank of the Gräfin von Reichenau—(the more so, indeed, as it has to be purchased with the Graf's own money.)"

This last sentence the Colonel muttered under his breath, and Valentine did not catch it. She would not have done so in any case, perhaps, for at the words, "Gräfin von Reichenau," she had started to her feet, panting like a wild war-horse. The smouldering embers had caught fire at last.

"Oh, father—father!" she cried, stretching out her hands, as Andromeda stretched out hers towards the rock before Perseus appeared, and whilst the dragon's mouth still yawned horribly wide and close to her poor little naked feet. "Spare me, father! I cannot—I will not—I dare not become Gräfin von Reichenau!"

Colonel Murray's eyes flashed.

"Why, what change is this?" he cried, fiercely. "Who have you been seeing during my absence?" he asked, with sudden suspicion. "Are these the sentiments of your English friends?"

"It is no change, as you know well enough, father," said poor Andromeda, pitifully. She knew there was no Perseus in the air for her, and she felt she must save herself, or sink into those hateful, yawning jaws. "From the first I said I never would marry the Graf von Rei-

chenau; from the first I knew I never could love him——"

"Love—love!" interrupted the Colonel, with a laugh that was not pleasant to hear. "What do you know about love, I should like to know?"

"What, indeed?" returned Valentine, bitterly. "I have not known much of it, in the course of my life, certainly. But I do know, or have heard, or read somewhere, that marriage without love is a bad thing. Is this news to you, my father?"

The father winced. It was a random shot; but it hit straight for all that.

"It cannot be that you do not know this," pursued Valentine, unconsciously. "You, who have been about so much in the world, must have seen scores of such marriages. Do not add one more to the number in the person of your daughter."

Colonel Murray laughed again. He was immensely relieved by Valentine's speech.

"You ought to write a book, Valentine," he said, mockingly. "An English novel; you have so much milk-and-water sentimentality about you. But come, now, be reasonable. Life, as you know very well, cannot be carried on by the moralizings of novelists. Life requires beef and mutton, not sugar, and stuff of that sort——"

"Life requires love," interrupted Valentine, in a low, clear, but strange sounding, far-away sort of voice. Indeed, she hardly recognized it herself. She hardly knew her own voice; she hardly acknowledged her own thought. It was as if someone else had taken possession of both for a second.

Colonel Murray started. The voice spoke to him across a sea of years, and brought rolling towards him wave after

wave of memories. He saw his dead wife trembling before him; his lost love standing up calm and cold, clear as the sky, that starless night at Coulanges. Which of these did Valentine resemble? Neither, he well knew. She resembled himself—her father; the ruined, reckless, broken-down, broken-hearted man.

For a moment, selfish, and sinful, and involved in many ways as he was, he had pity upon her—pity upon the young life that was just beginning and that might end like his. For a moment he was considering whether Andromeda's father could not cut Andromeda's chain; when suddenly the door opened, and Mademoiselle Madelon appeared.

"*Un jeune monsieur qui vient demander l'ombrelle de* Mademoiselle Carmichael," announced she, in her croaky voice, as she went peering and poking about under the tables and chairs.

The father and daughter looked up as

the old woman spoke, and saw the *jeune monsieur* standing in the doorway, tall, handsome, shy.

"I am afraid I am intruding," says he, in his brusque British way. "No, I won't come in, thank you. I did not intend to come upstairs, but" (with a glance at Mademoiselle Madelon, indicating uncertainty as to her social condition) "I am afraid my French is very feeble, I could not make myself understood. Oh! thanks, yes—that's the parasol. Good-night. Thanks."

CHAPTER III.

THE SEA-GULL.

"Alas, how easily things go wrong,
A kiss too much, or a sigh too long,
And there follows a mist, and a blinding rain,
And life is never the same again."

GEORGE MACDONALD.

AFTER all, Mr. Aylmer need not have troubled himself to have climbed all that way up to Mont St. Michel after Honor's parasol, for Miss Murray could easily have brought it back with her when she came down to the Rue Bon Secours, as usual, next morning.

Honor was rather surprised to see her. It was Valentine's custom to come in every morning and learn the arrangements for the day, and take her part in them. But it seemed strange she should do so now that her father had returned to her, and on the very first day after his return, too.

She said nothing, however, and they went out for their walk as usual. Down to the beach and back again. As they came homeward along the port, Stephen Aylmer joined them.

He had been to the Rue Bon Secours to inquire for them, and learning from Rosaline their probable whereabouts, had followed them thither. He scowled a little at Miss Murray at first, but on being formally introduced to her, shook hands pleasantly enough. Her company, however, evidently was not desired by him, for he placed himself by Honor's side, and made many surreptitious attempts

to draw her down by-streets and winding alleys. But his endeavours were frustrated. Gladys distinctly declined the pleasure of Miss Murray's exclusive company, and hung back as Stephen hung back, and sometimes loitered behind altogether. So these four unwilling companions walked abreast, untidily enough, hustling the passers-by, and hustling Stephen every now and then into the little gutters that ran along the sides of the street—which result did not altogether please Mr. Aylmer, and caused him to express a hope, as they sallied forth for their afternoon's walk, that they might not meet Honor's friend again.

Gladys fully entered into his feelings.

"Let us go to Petit Pierreport," she said, delighted to have found an ally. "We shall not be so likely to meet her there."

Honor nodded assentingly. Gladys

kissed her hand to little Gaspard, who was sitting on the doorstep of the hair-dresser's shop, eyeing them solemnly with his big black eyes; and to Madame Pléon, who was pulling the dangling bell-wire at the convent-door, and asking through the grating for Sœur Geneviève; and then off they started, up one street and down another, Gladys scudding on before, and keeping a sharp look-out at the street corners.

"Oh, there she is!" cried the child, at last, clasping her hands together in dismay. "There she is, posting down the Grande Rue after us."

"Could we not dive down a side-street?" suggested Stephen.

"I am afraid not," said Gladys, despondently. "She has seen us with those horrid cat's eyes of hers, and now she is waving her nasty green parasol" (with a double burr on all the r's), "to make us see her."

Honor looked round with a chiding smile. She remembered her father's injunction. Perhaps Gladys was really growing rather pert. Stephen, however, laughed outright, and complimented the child on her progress in her r's.

"We will walk together if Miss Murray joins us," he said, "and you shall give me a lesson in French pronunciation, Gladys." And walk with the child he did; to the secret disappointment, perhaps, of both the other girls.

There is not much to see at Petit Pierreport. It is only a small cluster of red-roofed cottages, crowned by a church, and dropped down like a flower-bed on a bit of undulating ground, between the rolling sea on the one side, and the waving cornfields on the other. It is a fishing village exclusively, but it possesses a quaint and ancient churchyard (the church itself has been

pulled down and built up again many times), which goes sloping down to the sands, where the winds and waves make endless moan for the dead, long after their earthly friends have forgotten them.

Part of this churchyard, the lowest part, nearest to the sea-wall, is appropriated to Protestant graves. There are not many of them in it, however, for Pierreport is a healthy place, and but few of the foreign visitors who come there for the summer months come to die. Mr. Carmichael had not yet had to read the funeral service over any one of his temporary and migratory flock.

Nevertheless—actuated no doubt by that morbid love of tombs which inspires the ordinary Englishman to walk off his friends to the nearest cemetery, as "the prettiest point in the neighbourhood,"—many and frequent were the pilgrimages

made by the visitors at Pierreport to the tiny churchyard beside the sea. Some came by to-day; two grand young ladies with their governess, a little bare-legged boy, their brother, running along behind them with a bunch of seaweed in his hand. They were the Mac B——s from Madame Pulliot's house in the Place Impériale. They turned back, however, without entering the churchyard. A funeral was taking place among the crosses and flowers in the Roman Catholic part of the burying ground. Gladys, who had run on before the rest of her party, stood at the gate, looking in with great awe-struck eyes.

"Sœur Geneviève is there," she said, as the others came up. "Madame Pléon could not have found her at the convent, when she asked for her just now."

"Come, Gladys," cried Honor, trying to lead the child away. The sight of all those weeping, black-robed people, made

her shudder. Stephen asked who Sœur Geneviève might be?

Honor began to explain. "She comes from the convent opposite our house in the Rue Bon Secours," she said.

Then Valentine interposed.

"She is one of those extraordinary beings who call themselves Brides of the Church, and yet dress themselves up as widows," she cried, with a mocking laugh.

Stephen laughed too. He was fond of a joke, as most men are; and though if Honor had happened to make that remark he would have been annoyed at her want of taste, it did not strike him in that light coming from Miss Murray. He even began to think her a sharp, amusing girl. A man's own particular womankind are always judged (by that officer himself, at least), by a very different standard from the rest of her sex.

But to Honor this was all very horrible. It seemed like laughing at the poor bereaved people, whose hearts were heavy, and whose eyes were sore with weeping. It seemed almost like mocking at the dead itself. She put her arm round Gladys' shoulder and led her away.

They went and sat down on the sands with their faces towards the sea, their backs turned upon the little red-roofed village and its wave-washed churchyard. A fish-wife went by, with her basket on her back, her baby slung round her waist in a shawl. The English children disappeared along the sands like specks on the horizon. There was an old fisherman sitting under the shade of an old boat. He smoked his pipe, and mended his net, and mumbled away to himself. Some children played round him, amidst the scrubby furze bushes and short scant grass that fringed the shore. They were tiny toddling things,

with bare legs, and little black caps tied down tightly under their little pink chins. They played together quietly, as if they feared to wake the dead, who lay sleeping so soundly close at hand. The waves came swishing in, softly, softly, singing their eternal *Schlummer-lied*. Our own little party sat very still and silent. At last Valentine spoke.

"I wonder where that bird is going?" she said, watching a sea-gull rise from its bed of sea-weed, and fly off towards the sea, flapping its white wings, and whirling round and round like a butterfly.

"Home to Mrs. Gull, I should think," suggested Honor.

"*Pas si bête*," replied Valentine, with a laugh. "Having once escaped from the screaming and screeching of Mrs. Gull, he is not likely to hurry himself to return to those dulcet sounds. At least I should say not, judging by my experience of human gulls."

"Who have been gulled into matrimony, I suppose," said Stephen, not addressing anyone in particular, but stealing a quick laughing glance at Honor, as he lay on the sands at her feet.

Miss Murray, however, received the remark with the contempt it deserved.

"I don't think I should do so either, under the circumstances," she said, continuing her own speech, and taking no notice of Mr. Aylmer's. "How delightful it must be to be a bird, and have the power of flying hither and thither, and wherever and whenever one pleases!"

Certainly Valentine was not in one of her home-longing moods to-day.

"But the power of flying, or rather the freedom to fly, must often depend more upon others than upon oneself, I should think," said Honor, thoughtfully. Both girls were perhaps looking at themselves under the figure of the sea-gull.

"How?" asked Valentine.

"Supposing there were only some little baby-gulls left in the nest," said Honor, softly and dreamily. "Or some helpless old birds, perhaps; then the strong gull would not be free to use his wings—then it would be selfish and wrong of him to fly away and leave them alone."

"I don't see that at all," returned Valentine, stoutly. "You speak as though there were only one gull in all the world. It is such a ridiculous notion that only certain people can fill certain places. Why, the world is full of people who could perform one's own small particular duties as well, if not better, than we can do them ourselves. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Aylmer?" It was the first time she addressed him pointedly.

Stephen hesitated. He did not like the girl, and it was a bore her tacking on to them in this manner. Still he could

not be rude to her; and besides, she did make rather sensible remarks—and on his side, too.

"I think you are right," he said. "I suppose it is a mistake to fancy oneself an indispensable being." And then he looked carefully away from Honor, and stretched out his long legs over the sand, and gazed at the sea.

But Honor jumped up as he spoke.

"It is time to go home," she said. "Come, Gladys." So homewards they went.

It was a silent walk. No one talked much except little Gladys, who chattered away incessantly to herself, doubtless finding her own society more congenial than that of her taciturn elders. Stephen was very absent. He was sorry to have hurt Honor's feelings, and yet might it not do her good? Valentine, who was neither quick nor sensitive, except

where her own immediate feelings were concerned, made a few spasmodic remarks, and was surprised to find them so coldly received. Honor scarcely spoke at all.

Poor Honor! hers was a tender, faithful nature, whose very blunders were occasioned chiefly because she had set herself such a lofty ideal, and the road was so steep that led up to it. At the present moment, all her powers seemed to be warring together, within herself; her head against her heart, her judgment against her feeling; and a most uncomfortable state of anarchy she found it. She was trying to think that Stephen was right, and she was wrong. But it would not do. It was like trying to believe a dogma in which she had no faith (I cannot help quoting Mr. Haweis here), or rather, it was like struggling to get into a coat too small for her. The dogma might not be false, the coat might be

large enough for other folks; but neither would fit her. There are so many things that are right for one person, and wrong for another.

It is of no use to lay down laws—least of all for ourselves. They are sure to be uprooted next day, by an express train of exigences. It is a terrible moment, when we first feel that our needs are larger than our neighbours, and that what satisfies them is insufficient for us. Later we learn, perhaps, that every condition has its compensations. But, for the time being, we feel adrift in a world full of fog; and even the light that is in it is so tainted with smoke—and love, and pity, and duty, are so mixed up with selfishness and vanity—that it would be impossible to grope our way aright but for those instincts which God has planted, like seeds, deep down in the hearts of each of us.

Honor's seed, had grown almost into a

tree, and she was so used to leaning against it that she believed things were only seen in their proper colours when looked at beneath its shade.



CHAPTER IV.

STEPHEN'S IDEA GROWS.

"A human heart should beat for two,
Whate'er may say your single scorners;
And all the hearths I ever knew
Had got a pair of chimney corners."

F. LOCKER.

HONOR aud Stephen had a pretty little reconciliation after Valentine had left them once more and when they were going up the dark, twisting stairs that led to the Chaplain's in No. 40, Rue Bon Secours.

"You did not really think that I meant what I said just now?" whispers Stephen

to Honor, laying his hand over hers, as she drags herself up the stairs by means of the iron balustrading. "You know you are, and always must be, the one and indispensable being to me?"

Did she know? Did she say so? Did she look as if she thought so? How can I tell? The staircase was very dark, the shutters outside the windows being closed to keep out the heat; and Honor's voice was very low—so low, that even Stephen himself had to put his face quite close to hers, in order to hear what she said, and

"I only hope we shall not always enjoy so much of your friend's company," he remarks, as they reach the landing at last.

Hopes which were vain, however. It was astonishing (at least to Honor it seemed astonishing), the immense amount of shopping which Valentine found necessary to execute just now. There

were ribbons to be matched, bands to be bought, autumn toilettes of all kinds to be invented and arranged. And as the best shops were all to be found in the Rue Bon Secours, Valentine was usually to be found there too, accompanied by Mademoiselle Madelon, carrying parcels.

"Are you buying your *trousseau?*" asked Honor, one day, meeting her thus. And then she suddenly bethought herself that the question was perhaps impertinent, and blushed like a rose.

For once in her life, Valentine blushed too.

"Oh no, no," she replied, hurriedly. "But *les affaires de mon père* have prospered well, and he has given me some money to fit myself out afresh. It has not come too soon, *ce don. Allons, chez* Juvet, *le gantier*, Mademoiselle Madelon."

It was perhaps for the same reason that Valentine took to haunting the

marché about this time. Prosperous *affaires* no doubt necessitate improved dinners, and *cette pauvre Madelon* had no ideas beyond *bouilli* and *fricandeau*, as Valentine informed Honor. The *marché* opens out of the Rue Bon Secours, as everybody who has been to Pierreport knows; and it was a pretty sight to see the young girl flitting about, pinching the fowls' breasts with the air of a *connaisseuse*, and inquiring gravely into the price of butter and eggs. Stephen met her there, thus employed, one day. He bought some flowers, and gave them to her, and then she looked prettier still. He told Honor about it afterwards.

"I like to see a woman interest herself in such matters," he said. "I should not have thought it of Miss Murray; but she has gone up considerably in my estimation since I saw her in the market this morning. It shows how wrong

first impressions may be. I fancied her foolish and frivolous. Now I should have no hesitation in recommending her as a good, steady house-keeper, even to a ready-made English family. Do you know of such a one, Honor?" (with a twinkle in his eye, unaccountable to his companion). "I daresay she can even cook. Foreign ladies have all sorts of accomplishments."

Honor did not say that second thoughts are sometimes more wrong than first impressions; nor that, judging by the ordinary way in which things were managed in the Avenue Mont St. Michel, she should be sorry to be abandoned for any length of time to Valentine's exclusive exploits in gastronomy. She merely remarked, with a smile and a blush, she was afraid she did not know much about cooking, herself.

"*You!*" cried Stephen, amused at the ingenious manner in which she had

brought the conversation round to herself. "Who ever mentioned *your* name in the matter? You are not going to take a situation in a ready-made family, are you? On the contrary, you are going to resign one, you know."

And yet, even then, Honor did not guess Stephen's idea.

He never would tell them what it was. Gladys teased about it at first, and Honor used to wonder a little. And then they forgot all about it. But Stephen would still, from time to time, allude to it mysteriously.

"Is not papa looking well? Has he not improved in spirits?" said Honor, to her usual interlocutor, one of those days, when they heard Mr. Carmichael laughing, absolutely laughing, over some small witticism of Valentine's. "My plan, as you call it, has not answered so badly, after all, has it, Stephen?"

"It is my idea, which is answering

better still," replies Stephen enigmatically. And then these two laugh together also.

Afterwards Stephen was sorry this idea had ever occurred to him. He never discovered, at least, not for years and years, whether there were any reasonable grounds for such a suspicion; but it tickled his fancy, and interested and amused him at first, and led him astray in the end. And that end was already beginning, although he knew it not.

And so he fell easily into the fashion of admiring Valentine, and laughing at her sayings as the others did. "Let her walk with us," he would say, "it makes our party larger." And Honor acquiesced, of course. She wanted everybody to be as happy as herself. She would have liked to believe that the whole world was peopled with lovers in those days. Valentine's lover was still away. They must make her as happy as they could,

during his absence. And so they went for long rambling walks over the hard yellow sands, and into the woods beyond Mont St. Michel. Valentine went with them always, Mr. Carmichael sometimes; and then, as Stephen hinted, the little party split up naturally and pleasantly, and they were all very comfortable together.

It was a delicious, dawdling time. No one had anything to do, and would not have done it if they had, as Mr. Aylmer also justly remarked. Such times are like bits of old age worked into one's youth. They often occur, I think, before, or after, any of the extra scrambles of life.

And so the days rolled away, the still lingering summer days, and the uncle in India had as yet made no sign. But the breath of autumn was already in the air, and the touch of his fingers on the trees of the forest, and the great ships were ploughing the great ocean, and postmen

were hurrying hither and thither, with the tidings of life and death, and the fate of millions closed and sealed in their hands.



CHAPTER V.

A BREAK IN THE RHYTHM.

"The little rift within the lover's lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening, slowly silence all."

TENNYSON.

AND so, as I have said, the days rolled away, one by one, for that little cluster of friends at Pierreport.

They were all alike—all smiling sunshiny days. Even to Honor, as she looked back upon them in after years, they seemed only like a sheet of water, shining and shimmering to and fro in

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the sunlight. Ah! by that time, poor soul, she, herself, was standing in the shade.

To Stephen, these days naturally appeared more monotonous still. It was not quite a wholesome life for an eager young man, and he felt this; but he did not say much about it. It was pleasant enough on the whole; an easy-flowing life, like an ever-recurring rhyme. It might be a little wanting in meaning at times, but Stephen was not going to complain of that. There would be plenty of time for heroics by-and-by.

There came a break in the rhythm at last.

"Colonel Murray has asked me to dinner," said Stephen, swinging himself into the Carmichaels' *salon* one fine morning. "What shall I do, Honor? Go —or not go?"

Honor hesitated a moment—scarcely a

moment. She did not know what she was deciding at that moment, or she might perhaps have hesitated longer. As it was, she looked up brightly and said:—

"Go, I should say, Stephen. There is no reason why you should not go, is there?"

Perhaps she hoped he would say there was. She fancied he had found it rather dull at Pierreport; which was not to be wondered at, seeing that her father, with all his improvements, was not very companionable even yet, and of her own powers she always entertained the smallest opinion. This was foolish of her, and made her feel faint-hearted and mistrustful at times. It is better to have a good opinion of oneself, if one wishes to extract a similar sentiment from the world in general. If one starts for a long walk, one is pretty sure of going a little way, whereas if one only intends to stroll down

the street, one often remains on the door-step all day long. The grasp that would compass something great, is almost certain to clasp a little bit of it, sooner or later; but the hand that fears to stretch an octave, is not likely to make much tune out of the notes between.

This, however, was not one of Honor's principles; and being a generous, confiding, humble-minded girl, she was content —nay, glad—that Stephen sometimes should exchange her little piping tunes for greater and grander music. It is sad, is it not, how often generosity has a tendency to drift into extravagance?

But what if she were mistaken about her little piping song? What if Stephen did not find it dull at Pierreport? What if it was only her faney, after all, and he were going to contradict her remark? She listened eagerly.

"I do not care much about going myself," he cried, in a careless, indifferent

tone. "But, since you wish it, Honor, I will accept Colonel Murray's invitation." And so the matter ended.

"You must tell me all about the party, to-morrow," said Honor, as, on the appointed evening, Stephen looked in for a moment, in all the unwonted splendour of evening attire. The Carmichaels were at tea at the time. Mr. Carmichael was stooping over his inevitable book. Honor was pouring out the tea. There was some crochet-work by her side. When no one was present Honor used to work a little during certain meals, Gladys being given to spinning out her feasts indefinitely. The child looked up now, and choked over a piece of bread and butter. Mr. Aylmer turned away hastily. I daresay it all seemed very dull and homely in his eyes. It is astonishing how one changes one's ideas as one changes one's clothes.

After all, Stephen hardly told them

anything about Colonel Murray's dinner party.

"It was not really a party," he said, somewhat testily, in answer to Honor's questions. "There was only one other fellow besides myself—an old Frenchman, a crony of the Colonel's. We had a very good dinner, and after dinner Miss Murray sang. And then, quite late in the evening, we had a rubber of whist, and one or two other games."

"'Musing games?" asked Gladys.

"Well—yes—they were new ones to me—at any rate," said Stephen, hesitatingly. And he put his hands in his pockets as he spoke.

"Oh, then you must teach them to me," said the child, patronisingly. "I want some new games so much. When will you begin—now, at once?" And she herself commenced operations by climbing over her future teacher's knee.

Her future teacher, however, did not

approve of this proceeding. "Don't bother," he said, pushing her away. "Go, and play with your doll, Gladys."

But the child stood up before him, with her little thumbs stuck into the sash of her frock, her great brown eyes scanning him gravely.

"I suppose you do not know the games well enough yourself, yet, Stephen, to be able to teach them to any one else," she said, slowly. And then she marched away with the air of an offended princess.

If he did not know them well enough then, he must soon have become proficient in them. That is to say, if practice has anything to do with perfection; which is doubtful. For Stephen Aylmer accepted many other invitations from Colonel Murray, and never seemed to think it necessary to ask Honor's advice upon the matter any more.

He was out again the next night, the

evening of the same day when the recorded conversation took place. He had some work to prepare for his Oriental master, he said. He left them before tea-time. The rooms in the Rue Bon Secours felt rather dreary without his deep ringing voice, and merry laugh.

The nights were beginning to grow chilly. "Yes, draw the curtains, please, Rosaline, and bring a lamp." Rosaline brought a lamp with a green shade. Mr. Carmichael fell to his reading immediately. Honor played at draughts with Gladys. The clock went on, ticking, ticking, ticking—knocking off the seconds one by one. It was getting near the child's bed-time.

Presently Rosaline came marching in again, with a letter in her hand.

"It was not for Monsieur," she said, "but for another English gentleman. The postman could not read the direction, so he had brought it here, thinking it

probable the *Ministre Anglais* might be able to inform of the address of his *compatriote*." And she laid the letter down upon the table.

Honor took it up. It was addressed to Stephen Aylmer, Esq., and had been re-directed from London in a perfectly illegible manner. It was an Indian letter Honor saw at once, and her hand shook and her heart throbbed at the thought of what might be contained within. The fate of two lives lay, perhaps, folded up between that sheet of paper.

"It is for Mr. Aylmer," said Honor, and her voice shook a little as she spoke. "I do not know the address of his lodgings, but the letter can be left here. He will probably call in the morning."

Rosaline nodded, and withdrew herself to finish her flirtation with *Henri le facteur*.

"Will not Aylmer be here to-night,

my dear?" asked Mr. Carmichael, closing his book, and folding his hands across it.

The spirit seemed suddenly to have evaporated out of his work, under the influence of Rosaline's cap and clacking shoes.

"No, papa," replied Honor, "his Oriental master is with him to-night."

"But he was not here last night, either, was he?" continued the father, who had certainly grown more alive to external events since he had been at Pierreport.

"No, papa," replied Honor, again. "He was dining with Colonel Murray last night."

"And he will not be here to-morrow night, either," cried Gladys, in her shrill, childish voice. "He is going to hear Valentine sing some new song. I heard her ask him, and I heard him say yes."

It was thus the sweet monotonous rhythm was broken—thus, the gently

flowing stream found itself suddenly full of little eddies, and whirls, and tides, and currents, setting this way and that. And the waters rose, and the tides swept on, for high in the sky, over the earth, a new moon had risen.



CHAPTER VI.

A GHOST STORY.

"A shadow flits before me,
Not thou, but like to thee."

MAUD.

THAT same evening *Henri le facteur* delivered another letter at another house; the person to whom it was addressed being also not there, at that moment, to receive it. This letter was directed not in an illegible hand, but in stiff, straight, square-topped characters, to M. le Colonel Murray, Avenue Mont St. Michel, Pierreport.

It was a thick letter, necessitating double postage, and the post-mark on it was Frankfurt.

Mademoiselle Madelon took in this letter. She came out of the kitchen to do so, and for once appeared without her mittens. Madame Pulliot accompanied her in a friendly manner, Mademoiselle Madelon being of a timorous temperament, and unnerved even by a sudden knock at the door. The pair had achieved a complete reconciliation soon after their last squabble, and had lived together in amity ever since. The paying of the rent had been the signing of peace. Madame Pulliot had kept her curiosity within tolerable bounds since then, and Mademoiselle Madelon was decidedly a person of importance in her capacity of Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Murray family. Besides which, there were other secrets, and sweet *dédommagements* for both of them, poor old souls.

So far does the sun of prosperity throw his glittering beams.

"*Quel gros paquet?*" says Madame Pulliot, weighing the letter in her fat podgy hands. "It doubtless contains something most precious—more bank-notes, perhaps—eh, my friend?"

"Something more precious than bank-notes to Mademoiselle, I should fancy," replies Mademoiselle Madelon, with a senile giggle. Since their improved circumstances, the little *dame de compagnie* was more than ever tenacious of the dignity of "the family."

"What—love-letters?" inquires Madame Pulliot, with astonishing alertness of apprehension.

Mademoiselle Madelon nodded. They had retreated once more to the kitchen by this time, where something of unusual importance was taking place among the pots and pans, to judge by the spluttering and hissing they made. Mademoi-

selle Madelon went round from one to the other, peeping into this, stirring that, tasting them all indifferently. Madame Pulliot followed her with her eyes.

"Ah! it is from *Monsieur l'Allemand*, then," she said, laying the letter down on the table, beside her friend's mittens. "You recognize his hand-writing, *chère amie?*"

Mademoiselle Madelon nodded again. She was not going to commit herself one way or the other.

"There ought to be a good bundle of them, certainly, seeing they come so seldom," continued Madame Pulliot. "Not that I should fancy *Monsieur l'amant* had much to say for himself, nor does he seem to be in a hurry to say it, if he has. *Voilà*," (jotting the words off on her fat fingers), "*deux, trois, quatre semaines que Monsieur le Colonel est de retour*, and the faithful lover appears no more.

C'est drôle çà—pourtant——" and here Madame Pulliot winked her black eyes, and screwed up her thick lips, and looked as though she were about to whistle a little tune.

"The faithful lover will return in due time," replied Mademoiselle Madelon, stiffly. She was bending over the *poèle*, with her back to Madame Pulliot, so that lady's suggestive attitudes were lost upon her.

"In due time—yes, no doubt," assented Madame Pulliot, shrugging her old shoulders, which action was also lost upon her friend. "And, in the meantime, *Mademoiselle se console* prettily enough, *avec les promenades, les piqueniques, les diners*, and now to-night *le théâtre*, with another *jeune homme, plus beau que l'autre à ce qu'il me paraît.* Does this *beau jeune homme* return to supper also?"

"*Ma foi, j'espère que non*," responded

Mademoiselle Madelon, in a fuss. "All this is for to-morrow," casting an artist's eye round upon the implements of her craft. "*Monsieur a commandé le diner pour demain*, but for to-night he said never a word."

"*Et pour demain*, how many guests?" inquired Madame Pulliot, glancing round at the flesh-pots too.

"Five or six," replied Mademoiselle Madelon. "There will be the Colonel and his daughter, and Monsieur Aylmère, in whose honour the dinner is made; and *le vieux Baron de Contencourt*, who will bring his man Adolphe to wait; and Monsieur Lévi, if he can get away from his patients, and who will be the most honest man of the party, to my taste," says little Mademoiselle Madelon, inspecting the state of her soup-pot.

"And who knows where he can get *plats* to *his* taste," adds worthy Madame Pulliot, with adroit flattery. "*Ah! mon*

amie, *quel potage*, clear as wine, and bright as liquid gold."

"Will you try some of it, and see whether it is likely to be to the taste of Dr. Lévi?" asks Mademoiselle Madelon, looking round, and smiling affably. Her face is somewhat browner than usual, but that is, no doubt, the result of her late exertions over the *poèle*. She pours some of the "liquid gold" into two little basins, which she places on the table in an engaging manner.

The potage was pronounced perfect; so was an omelette, which came leaping off the fire on to the table; as was also a little dish of cutlets, nicely browned and *parsemé* with herbs. It was as if the conjuror and his cornucopia were present, and dealt out to each one his favourite dish, said Madame Pulliot, who seemed to be in a pleasantly poetical mood to-day. Then she remarked that

the Colonel did not seem to be sparing in the matter of supplies.

"Not he," returned Mademoiselle Madelon, enthusiastically. "When he has any money he spends it as fast as he can. I tell him sometimes he has a hole in his pocket."

"It is a mercy if he has not a hole in his head," responds Madame Pulliot, enigmatically. And once more she seems disposed to whistle that little tune.

"What do you mean?" asks Mademoiselle Madelon, majestically. She was clearing away the remains of the *petit souper*, but stopped short as she spoke, with a sheaf of knives and forks in her hand.

Madame Pulliot helped herself to a last remaining glass of wine.

"I will tell you—yes, I must tell you," she began, confidentially. "I feel I should go mad unless I told someone, and you ought to be on your guard,

chère amie. Well, it was the other night, three days ago, at twilight. You had gone down to the Rue Bon Secours to fetch Mademoiselle, and I, being alone in the house, opened the door to Monsieur. He came in shaking and trembling in every limb. He stumbled along the passage and up the stairs. I follow him; I open his door for him and light a candle. His hair is standing on end, his eyes are starting out of their sockets. '*Qu'est ce donc, Monsieur le Colonel?*' I ask, shaking like a leaf myself. He started as I spoke, then sank down in a chair. 'Nothing, nothing,' he said, with a laugh. 'I fancied I saw a ghost in the lane, that is all.' And then he laughed again, but, *mon Dieu*, what a laugh! It seemed to shake the whole house. 'Leave me,' he said, hoarsely; and I did so, taking care first of all to close the window, for fear the ghost in the lane should take a fancy to walk into the

house. Not that such a precaution would be of the least use, to be sure, for ghosts are like evil thoughts—they come and go unbidden, and no bolts, or bars, or locks, or shutters will keep them out. But I did so involuntarily, and as I did so, I glanced down into the lane. There was no ghost there then, only one of the sisters from the convent in the town and that old solitary owl of a Pléon standing together talking. I think the sister was she they call Sœur Geneviève. I could see her face plainly, for it was up-turned, and the moon had risen. It looked sharp and white, in that cold light, and Madame Pléon seemed to be talking in an agitated way. But there was nothing else ghostly about them. '*Bah! mon beau Colonel*, you have a fine imagination,' thought I to myself. *Pourtant*, the next night——"

Here, again, Madame Pulliot's lips assumed the whistling position, and she

seemed disposed to pause in her thrilling narrative.

"*Eh bien, pourtant?*" repeats Mademoiselle Madelon, who, with her sheaf of forks, has not moved from the spot whereon Madame Pulliot's tale had first fixed her.

"Well—the next day—at the very same hour," resumes Madame Pulliot, having fortified herself with the remaining drop of wine in her glass. "As I was returning from the woods, whither I go to get faggots, I suddenly heard the sound of steps behind me. It was a lonely place, just beyond Madame Pléon's cottage, and I felt my limbs begin to shake. Thud—thud—closer and closer, came the steps; very heavy ones they were, as was not to be wondered at when I saw whose ghost it was. I felt its breath, like a wind behind me—its shoulder rubbed against mine—its hand swung against me—it nearly upset me, for it was an awk-

ward ghost—it was the ghost of *le gros Aliemand! Bonsoir, Monsieur*, cry I, not wishing to give way to my foolish fancies. But it took no notice; ghosts never do, of course. It went on sweeping and shouldering along the lane, and down the steps, till it took the turn that leads to the *chemin-de-fer*. And there I lost sight of it," concludes Madame Pulliot impressively. "*Jugez maintenant*, my friend, whether this may, or may not have been the ghost seen by *Monsieur le Colonel* the night before."

But Mademoiselle Madelon was incapable of judging anything of the sort. She was a woman of weak nerves, and seemed to be strangely moved by Madame Pulliot's tale.

"I don't like ghost-stories," she gasped, glancing round nervously. "Shall we have some coffee?"

Madame Pulliot assented willingly. Her friend had weak nerves, certainly,

but her coffee was not to be despised. They were sitting together very comfortably over the tall brown pot, when suddenly there came a ring at the door. Mademoiselle Madelon nearly leapt out of her chair.

"It is only Monsieur and Mademoiselle who return from the theatre, you silly frightened creature," says Madame Pulliot encouragingly. "Go and open to them—Here, take the letter. I will follow with the lamp."

Madame Pulliot was right. Monsieur and Mademoiselle had returned. Mademoiselle was saying "*Bonsoir*" over and over again to some one in the darkness. Monsieur was kicking his heels on the threshold.

"What do you mean by keeping me waiting like this?" he began, angrily. And then Mademoiselle Madelon put the letter into his hand.

He tore it open—glanced at the first

line, and uttered an angry exclamation.

"He has seen another ghost," whispers Madame Pulliot to Mademoiselle Madelon. She still held the lamp, and had let its light fall fully on the wild, haggard face of Colonel Charles Murray.

CHAPTER VII.

A FAIRY STORY.

"I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee."

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

COLONEL MURRAY was in possession of his letter sooner than Stephen Aylmer received his; though whether he was to be congratulated upon that fact, is an open question. I hardly think he himself would have answered it in the affirmative.

Young Aylmer arrived later than usual

in the Rue Bon Secours next morning.

"There is another Monsieur in the *salon*," says Rosaline, admitting him. "A *drôle de monsieur* with a *drôle de figure*. He is a *ministre* too, I think. And there is also a letter for Monsieur on the table."

The "*drôle de monsieur* with the *drôle de figure*," was, as Stephen instantly divined, no other than Mr. Wynch. He had come over by the morning boat. He had some questions on parochial matters to put to the Vicar, and it was as easy to come as to write. At least, so he said. This was Wednesday, he was going back on Saturday.

They were all sitting together in the *salon*. Mr. Carmichael without his book for once, Mr. Wynch with Gladys on his knee, and Honor bending over her work, and joining in the conversation now and then. Stephen seemed to be shot in

among them like a cannon-ball. They all started up as he entered. He greeted the curate cordially enough, and expressed a decent amount of pleasure at this unexpected meeting. He had sometimes rather vaguely regarded Mr. Wynch as a possible rival in Honor's affections, but his fear on this point was not very great, and did not trouble his head just now. Afterwards, it did occur to him as rather strange that Mr. Wynch should have come all the way over to Pierreport, merely to ask a question, on, say—Sunday-school primers.

Miss Murray was announced the moment after Stephen's arrival. She was dressed in one of her new toilettes, and came in smiling, and looking as fresh as a rose. She had brought a present for Gladys, a little sugar priest, with a long red nose, and a bottle under his arm instead of a book. It was a very pretty present for a clergyman's child, but

Gladys did not seem to appreciate it very much.

Honor gave Stephen his letter. He tore it open and read it, line by line. Honor's eyes followed him. What did she read written there? Surprise, pleasure, triumph, an assured future, a bright vision of hope fulfilled? Would a less brilliant lot have seemed fairer in her sight—a life less easy, perhaps, and more homely? No—no—surely she was not so selfish. Stephen was fitted for great things, and great things he must have.

She looked up and smiled at him, as he looked down at her. Then he crunched the letter up in his pocket, and glanced at Valentine. Mr. Carmichael was talking to her at that moment, and Mr. Wynch was watching, in his wistful dog-like way, Honor's flushed and eager face. It was not certainly a moment for a private and personal discussion.

"You must show Mr. Wynch the

humours of Pierreport, Miss Murray; its greatest beauty he has already seen," Mr. Carmichael was saying, with an old-fashioned bow. "I regret extremely that I shall not be able to accompany you in your walk to-day, as I have been sent for by a sick parishioner from a distance."

Valentine condoled with him gravely.

"We shall miss you very much, Mr. Carmichael," she said; and she shook her head prettily when Mr. Wynch was presented as an "excellent substitute" by the still facetious Vicar. Poor Mr. Wynch, who was not a little astonished at his Vicar's attempts at badinage—which, truth to say, were rather of the heavy order, and somewhat resembled an elephant trying to leap like an antelope—bowed slightly, and twitched a good deal. Valentine could hardly keep her countenance.

"Do you like the society of priests, dear?" she asked of Honor, as the latter

retreated to her apartment to array herself for the promenade.

"Ah! I forgot. *Je vous demande mille pardons.* You will marry a *ministre, n'est-ce pas?* Clergymen's daughters always marry their father's curates, I have heard. And this one—well, he is not graceful, but he is good, I am sure. And you are so good, too. You will just match. Yes—I see it all—I see it all," repeats Valentine, with a prophetic air.

"Am I so ugly, too?" asks Honor, laughing. But she did not think it necessary to contradict, or respond to, any of her friend's other statements.

Having perceived thus clearly the state of affairs, Valentine naturally acted upon it in the most friendly manner. She left Honor and Mr. Wynch as much alone as possible. It would be a pity to spoil such a pretty game, she said to herself. She hinted as much to Mr. Aylmer, who happened to be walking with her at the time.

He stared at her, and began to say something; then stared at the couple before him, and held his tongue. But this was a day or two later, when they were strolling through the streets. Valentine, in fact, was lagging behind, and looking into a bonnet shop as she spoke.

To-day, however, they went on the pier, and then for a stretch on the sands as far as Petit Pierreport and back again. Honor, of course, walked with Mr. Wynch, as she had the cicerone part of the business to do. Valentine knew nothing—had never been there before—at least, so she said, whenever Honor stopped and appealed to her for information. Honor was obliged to supply Mr. Wynch as best she could out of her own slender store of knowledge. Valentine, however, seemed to have plenty to say to Mr. Aylmer. They were talking about operas, ballets, &c. Valentine had been in so many places, and seen so much. Honor caught

the words "theatre" and "last night." Then Mr. Wynch made some remark about "the cretaceous formation of rocks." Poor fellow, *his* subjects were the sillures and the old red sandstone, and the grey-wacke series, and Honor found them very dull, and grey, and sandy indeed.

By-and-by, he began telling Gladys a fairy-story. It was not a very brilliant one, but the child seemed to like it. She had clung to the curate all day, and would hardly say a word to Stephen, who, however, bore her neglect with equanimity.

The story was about a good fairy and a bad one, both of whom traverse millions of miles to be present at the birth of some little prince. A struggle ensues as to which of the two fairies shall guide the destinies of the new-born mortal. The good fairy conquers in the end, of course, and carries off the little prize; but the bad fairy, being of an ingeniously deceptive nature, manages to put her

sister through a long course of tortures first of all. Honor found herself listening in spite of herself. Gladys was deeply interested.

"But why did not the good fairy use her wand when the bad fairy met her in the wood?" asked the child. "All the fairies have wands, you know. They are made of ferns, and when they stretch them out towards anything that will hurt them, such as a snake, or a bat, or a bunch of poisonous berries, the leaves on the wand shrivel up, and that is a sign they are not to go near these things. Oh! I know all about it," added Gladys, with a smile of superior wisdom. "Honor told me."

"And I know nothing," said Mr. Wynch, humbly. "Won't you tell me all about it?"

The child was delighted. She was as garrulous as an old woman. She began at once, and went on till they reached the

Rue Bon Secours. Honor yawned once or twice, but she did not mind much. It saved her from the necessity of talking. Mr. Wynch must have enjoyed it thoroughly.

"What a pity mortals have not fern wands, too!" he said, as the child's tongue was still at last. And then he looked at Honor, and glanced over his shoulder at the pair who were loitering along behind.

"Won't you come in?" said Honor, with cold politeness, as the loiterers reached them at last. But Valentine shook her head, and Stephen declined. He had engagements for the afternoon and evening, he said. He whispered to Honor he would be with her early in the morning, however. And then he volunteered to escort Miss Murray "part of her way home." After she had got into bed, and long before she went to sleep, Honor remembered what Gladys had said about Stephen and Valentine, and a song.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHORT BUT NOT SWEET.

" Some may find and hold them, never to let go,
Hearts that would enfold them in their vital glow,—
When Circumstance comes in and works them double woe."

R. MONCKTON MILNES.

STEPHEN AYLMER kept his word, and presented himself in the Rue Bon Secours very early next morning. It was before breakfast, in fact. Honor was up, however, and at the moment of his arrival was making hot buttered toast in the kitchen, such a barbarous English *mets* being beyond, or below, or above, Rosaline's

powers. Honor came out of the kitchen with the toasting-fork in her hand.

"Oh, it is you, is it?" she says, laughing. "I could not think whose step it was on the stairs." And she lays down her formidable two-pronged weapon.

"Were you prepared to fight the intruder?" says Stephen, laughing too. "I was on my way to bathe, and I thought—" here he wants to say something sweet—tender; but fails. It is difficult to be sentimental in cold blood, the first thing on a bright breezy morning; it is like eating sugar-plums before breakfast, or reading a novel at daybreak. "Here, look at this," he says, pulling the letter out of his pocket, and placing it in her hand.

Honor took it, and read it. It was a kind letter, brief, and to the point. It contained the offer of an excellent appointment under Sir Henry Aylmer, Stephen's uncle, and the Governor of the

P— district. The advantages of this proposed post were undeniable. It was in a good climate, and amid pleasant surroundings. The salary was large, and there were very few necessary expenses. The late occupier was retiring on the fortune he had made in the office. He might have retired long ago, but that he was a man of a covetous turn of mind. The only cloud in this brilliant prospect (so long as we stay on this side of the sun, there must always be a shady corner somewhere), was an enforced seven years' residence in the above-mentioned district.

This cloud was but a little one, as Sir Henry Aylmer, who had passed more years of his life in India than in England, justly remarked, and need not stand in his nephew's light. He expected the young man to join him early in the following year. Honor refolded the letter, and sighed as she did so.

"Now I can tell your father," says Stephen, in a tone of satisfaction. "I will ask him to give me a few moments this very—"

But Honor interposed suddenly.

"Oh, not just yet, Stephen," she cried, clasping her hands together. "Not just yet. Give me a little time first—I want to think about it myself—I want—to make up—my own mind—first," she said slowly, and the light faded out of her face as she spoke, and the laugh shrank away from her eyes and lips; she stood before Stephen, a pale, quivering thing, like a trembling, wind-tossed flower.

Stephen looked at her in angry surprise.

"Give you time!" he cried. "Have you not had time all these weeks past?" He knew the tussle was beginning, and he wanted to persuade her, and himself, that it was past. "You are not

afraid of going to India, are you, Honor?"

Honor was silent.

"It is no worse than going to Ireland," continued the young fellow, persuasively. "Indeed it is far better in some ways. Your father said so only the other day—at least I said so, and he agreed. I thought you were in the room at the time."

Still Honor was silent.

"You knew the letter would come some day," cried Stephen, growing angry again. "What have you been thinking of all this time?"

Then, at last, Honor spoke.

"I have been thinking of the sea-gull," she said, in a low quavering voice. "And oh, Stephen, I do not know yet which of us was right that day—Valentine, or I. I wish—I wish I did know!" And the poor girl looked up at him appealingly.

Stephen turned upon her roughly. "Is

that all you have to say?" he began, fiercely. And he looked as if he himself might have a good deal more to say, when suddenly the door opened, and Mr. Carmichael appeared, clean-shaved, and neat, and trim, and ready for breakfast. Mr. Wynch followed, with Gladys clinging to his hand, and still instructing him in the mysteries of fern wands. It was astonishing how much he had forgotten since yesterday.

"What, Aylmer! You here, at this time in the morning? Are you hatching some conspiracy with Honor? You will stay to breakfast, of course," cries the unconscious Mr. Carmichael, whilst Mr. Wynch glances from one conspirator to the other (who both look very uneasy), with his keen, short-sighted eyes; and little Gladys nearly lames herself for life by tumbling over the toasting-fork.

But Mr. Aylmer refuses to stay to breakfast.

"I merely looked in as I passed," he muttered. "I wanted to tell Honor about my Indian prospects. I thought she would be pleased to hear of them. No, I cannot stay now, thank you. She will tell you all about—about my future—another time, I daresay," he added, with rather a bitter smile. Then he took up his hat, and walked away without another word.

Mr. Wynch looked after him silently.

"He would not stay to breakfast, of course," sings out Gladys, who is riding round and round the room on the toasting-fork, like a little witch on a broom-stick, "because—because there is no toast!"

CHAPTER IX.

SUSPENSE.

"Will it be peace or pain?
Will it be joy or strife?
What doth thy hand contain,
Life, for my life?"

HEINRICH SCHWARZ.

AND so the long expected letter had come from India, and the upshot of it was confusion. Honor did not know what Stephen meant, still less what she meant herself. Sometimes she thought she did know. Sometimes she fancied she could see her way clear before her; matters had arranged

themselves; difficulties had disappeared; she was already bidding adieu to someone—and that someone—who was it? Stephen, or Gladys? This was the point at which she staggered. She could get so far, but no further. She could not choose between the two, and yet she knew that one of the two she must forsake. She was like the sea-gull, in very truth, now mounting up for a little space, and whirling round and round for a moment; then tumbling back again into the sea of doubt and perplexity. It was a painfully uncertain position for a single-minded maiden.

Mr. Wynch went away on Saturday, as he had promised. Before he went he led the conversation back, once more, to the subject of the fern wands.

"I wish you had one, Honor," he said. He had always called his Vicar's daughter by her Christian name, in consideration of his own position in the parish, and of

her tender age when he had assumed that position; but since the day on which she gave him back the emerald ring, he had been rather shy of using his privilege. "I wish you possessed a fern wand, dear."

"Why do you wish that?" asked Honor, not caring much about the subject in hand, but languidly endeavouring to keep the conversation going.

"Because—because—I think it would be useful to you just now," stammered the poor little man. For all his short-sightedness, he could see which way matters were wending pretty clearly, but he did not know how to say what he saw. His thoughts outran his words, as it were; he floundered about, and became almost unintelligible.

"I don't know what you mean," says Honor, which was not to be wondered at, certainly. Nor did she seem to care to

know. She strangled a yawn, and looked into the shop-windows as she passed. Mr. Wynch's conversation was apt to grow monotonous after a time, and a little of it went a long way.

"I mean—I wish——" resumed Mr. Wynch, striking out afresh, and glancing round as he spoke. "What a good thing it would be if we mortals were gifted with magic wands, as well as Gladys' fairies. We might choose our friends more wisely then."

Honor glanced round too. It was the day they went strolling through the streets to the cathedral in the upper town, and the identical moment at which Valentine had chosen to loiter behind, and gaze into a bonnet-shop.

"I can choose my friends without the help of a magic wand," began Honor haughtily, still looking behind her. Then she turned round with a startled look in her eyes, and a flush on her pale

face, and added more gently, "Did you come all the way to Pierreport to say this to me, Mr. Wynch?"

She tried to laugh, but it was a miserable failure. Mr. Wynch looked at her pitifully.

"To say this—no, indeed," he cried. "God knows I came to say something very different, but that will keep a little longer. What I want to do now is to warn you, Honor. I mistrust your friend, and I wish you did not trust in her so much, yourself. I do not think she is honest. I fear she may bring you trouble, or give you pain in some way or other. I have no reason for saying this? No. It is merely a feeling. It is wrong then to give expression to it, you think? Perhaps so. But I cannot help it. I cannot help feeling it—I cannot help saying it—because I love you, Honor."

It was an unfortunate termination to an otherwise eloquent speech. Honor had

listened to him attentively enough at first, but as he came to the end, she looked at him impatiently.

"I thought you had promised never to speak to me like that, again," she said, in a chill reproachful sort of way. And then she stopped short, and waited for Stephen and Valentine to join her, and remained by their side for the rest of the walk. Nor did she speak again to Mr. Wynch till the time came for bidding him good-bye.

After he was gone, the walks went on as usual, though they never were quite the same to Honor. She seemed to miss something out of them, and she could not tell what that something was. Stephen joined them still, or Mr. Carmichael sometimes, and Valentine always. And yet—"there was something the season wanted, though the ways and the woods smelt sweet."

Meanwhile "the ways, and the woods" were flushing, and blushing all over, and

the days were shrinking a little, dropping their moments, as the trees dropped their leaves. Summer was deepening into autumn. The season of roses was past. It was no dreary time however. Autumn in the south is a very different thing from autumn in the north. There is no dampness here, no mouldiness and decay. None, or but very few, of those signs of death, which are so dismal and dreary in the lands beyond the sea. The leaves drop, it is true, but they drop to dance, not to die. The wind pipes them a tune, and round they whirl away from the woods aflame with colour, over the fields alight with gold, up and down through the warm crisp air in which the breath of summer still lingers, and to which the kiss of autumn is so reluctantly given.

Yes, autumn in the south is the year's sunset, glorious and gorgeous in its purples and crimsons; not the melancholy funeral time it is in the north, when the

whole earth looks like a big brown grave, till the winter comes and flings down upon its bareness a cold white pall of snow. Honor shivered already as she thought of the coming winter.

Generally she enjoyed the thought of battling with the bleak weather, of feeling her fingers tingle and glow with frost and snow. But the mere prospect of winter made her shiver now. She tried to account for this. She remembered last winter; how they all went together to watch the skaters one day, Stephen being among the performers, and how he carried Gladys across the ice on his shoulder, and pushed Honor about in a chair; and then one night when they had stayed out late shopping, and Gladys had gone into ecstacies over the stars and the lamps. Next year, the child would be too big to be carried, certainly, and perhaps would care less for the stars and the lamps—and

Stephen—Stephen—where would Stephen be?

When the winter was past, and the spring was at hand once more, Stephen Aylmer was to be in India! That was all Honor knew.



CHAPTER X.

THE LUMP OF ICE.

"It is always one's good deeds that turn round and sting us, like wasps."—PASCARÈL.

HONOR stood one day on the outskirts of the wood beyond Mont St. Michel. It was not much of a wood in point of extent, but it was rich with various kinds of trees, and glorious and glowing with every sort of colour. There were poplars standing up like churches, and pines waving their hearse-like heads, and scarlet cherry boughs, and golden *ginques*, and

lesser trees growing in and out beside them, flinging their branches down to the ground, like so many obsequious Raleighs, and giving a shadow to the shades, just as the bass notes of music give substance to the song. It was a revel of tints, a perfect symphony of colour.

Honor, however, was not listening to that music. She was standing with her back to the wood, and her face towards the little town that lay nestling in the hollow, kissed by the sun and caressed by the sea. Such a gay little town as it was, with its red roofs, and white spires, and green shutters, flapping backwards and forwards in the breeze; and that general air of sparkle and sprightliness about it which sea-bound towns always seem to possess, just as if they were washed daily in crystallized salt water. There was a dusty road leading from the town to the mill, and a bit of rough, upland ground between the mill and the wood. On this

slope some sheep were feeding. They stared at Honor in a stupid, sheepish sort of way: so did a melancholy-looking cow that was grazing there also. Beyond the slope, stretched a succession of corn-fields, bare now and stubbly, with a few scarlet poppies growing in the hedges, and a dark, golden-eyed pansy or two peeping out here and there. There was a little cluster of cottages at the foot of the slope, in one of which lived Madame Pléon, the lady-superintendent of the lady-bathers; and Honor, as she stood on the *lisière* of the little wood, fancied she could hear every now and then the click-clacking of that mysterious person's *sabots*, and the deep tones of her strange, vibrating voice.

It was not altogether her fancy, though it might have been so. When one is alone, one always begins to listen to dumb voices, and to people deserted villages; which is an excuse for Spiritualism, and

would be a proof, if proof were needed, that it is not good for man, much less for woman, to be alone.

Honor had been alone some time. She was waiting for Gladys. Ever since the time when Valentine had become one of their daily party, the child had got into a trick of loitering behind during their walks, and of running like a little dog into any door she chanced to see set open. It was a very tiresome trick, open doors being much the fashion at Pierreport. She seldom, however, lingered long, and always re-appeared safe and sound, so Honor was not anxious about her: only rather tired of waiting. And to-day she had really been waiting a long time.

Stephen and Valentine had waited with her, till they had grown tired too. Then Valentine had said she would go into the wood and rest. Mr. Aylmer might go with her and find her a com-

fortable seat, and then return to Honor. By that means they would know where to find her when the child rejoined them, and they continued their walk.

But the comfortable seat must have been difficult to find, for Stephen had not yet returned to her.

"Won't you come with us?" they had said, looking back at her, as they went on into the wood. But Honor had refused. The wood, though not large was yet a complete labyrinth. The trees grew so thickly together, that she feared she might lose the child, for a long time at any rate, if she got entangled in one of those twisting paths. So she stood without, waiting.

It was about a week after Mr. Wynch's departure, and Honor, if she was not exactly thinking of the curate, was at least meditating upon something he had said to her. What did he mean by his warning? Why had he made her look

round that day, when they went strolling along the streets, and Valentine had loitered behind to gaze into the bonnet shop, and Stephen had stood beside her, hitting his stick against the pavement.

That was all she had seen. It was not very distinct, and yet she could not forget that glance. It seemed to open up to her a long vista of vague and sad possibilities. Words were as trees moving, looks as birds flitting from bough to bough, with messages on their wings. The trees were moving now—nay, talking. Honor could hear them quite plainly.

"But caring for people often brings with it more pain than pleasure, after all," said a voice, clear and ringing, and unmistakable. "I often wish I were as Honor is, so still, calm, and cold. I do not really think she cares much for anyone in the world, except little Gladys. She is not unfeeling, but she does not

feel deeply. She is like a lump of ice; she makes me shiver, sometimes."

For a moment there was no answer to these rambling remarks. For a moment, the listener thought the speaker might perchance be talking away to her *alter ego*, or Philon Heter, or whatever may be the classical and correct term for our other and inner selves. The next moment, however, all such thoughts vanished away like dew before the dawn.

"Do you find Honor so very cold-hearted, then?" responded a second voice, unmistakable also. "You are not complimentary to your friend, Miss Murray."

"Truth can never be complimentary," remarked the first voice. And this didactic remark, whether true or not, remained uncontradicted.

Then the sound of footsteps and voices faded away into silence, and the speakers had probably wound their way round one of those twisting, tangled paths, never

knowing how near they had been to the borders of the wood, nor guessing how their chance words had floated out athwart the leaves, and fallen upon the ears of one who stood without waiting.

As for that one, she stood there still, silent and calm, and colder than ever. For —she was frozen.

One may as well be what the world says one is; and, in this case, Honor had no choice. She was suddenly and instantaneously frozen.

When the frost falls upon the flowers, some of them turn black as death, others hang their heads and wrinkle up their faces. But when a human heart turns to ice, there is only a little shiver, a little shake, and no one but its owner is a bit the wiser.

"Valentine was right," said Honor bitterly, to herself. "Caring for people does bring one more pain than pleasure.

It is better, far better, to have a heart of ice. That, at least, can never be ruffled, or troubled, until—until—it is broken."

And the poor girl sank down upon the grass, and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT GLADYS SAW IN MADAME PLÉON'S COTTAGE.

"She looks up the forest whose alleys shoot on
Like the mute minster aisles when the anthem is done—

.

'Onora, Onora!'
And forward she looketh across the brown heath
'Onora, art coming?'" E. BARRETT BROWNING.

MEANWHILE, over the stubble-field, and the straw and the poppies, a child was running, and a little voice was calling, "Honor—Honor, where are you, Honor?"

But Honor, for once, like her namesake Onora, answered not.

She started up though, as the child touched her.

"Where have you been all this time, Gladys?" she asked, in a hollow sounding voice.

"Only into Madame Pléon's cottage," replied the child, panting. She was frightened too. Honor looked so strange and stern. Was she going to faint again, as she had done that terrible morning in the bathing-machine?

"Madame Pléon called me—yes, she did, Honor. I peeped in first, for I wanted to hear the funny clock strike, and I saw Sœur Geneviève sitting on a chair, and Madame Pléon kneeling on the floor beside her. Sœur Geneviève was crying, and Madame Pléon was talking to her. I could not understand much, but it was something about a photograph, I think, for Sœur Geneviève had one in her hand. And then, by-and-by, Madame Pléon looked up and saw me standing there, and called me to her. 'What is the name of thy sister's friend, *petite?*' she

said, and when I told her 'Valentine Murray,' Sœur Geneviève cried out as if I had hit her, and covered her face with her hands. And then Madame Pléon pushed me away, and I had to run off without hearing the clock strike after all." The child stopped at length, absolutely from want of breath, and she looked up at Honor as if she expected her to fill up the hiatus.

But Honor showed no disposition to do so.

"What does it all mean?" gasped Gladys, after giving her tongue about five minutes' respite.

"I don't know, I am sure, dear," replied Honor, who, truth to tell, had not been listening very attentively. The child was not a little given to relating highly sensational stories, but as they usually bore a strong family likeness to each other, a very small amount of attention was sufficient to keep one well

posted in them. Now, however, Honor was caught tripping.

"I don't believe you have been listening to a word I have been saying," cries Gladys, highly indignant. "Perhaps I had better begin again."

"Perhaps you had," says Honor. It would at least spare her from the necessity of talking herself.

Not that it did do so altogether. Gladys adopted the interlocutory style this time, and asked questions as she went on. "What did this mean? And why was Sœur Geneviève crying? And for what reason could Madame Pléon desire to know Valentine's name?" Poor Honor's position of listener was no sinecure this time. Her answers were almost as voluminous as the story itself; and as second editions have always a tendency to become more bulky than the first, there is no saying to what proportions Gladys' novel might not have swelled, had

not Stephen and Valentine re-appeared and brought it to a summary conclusion.

"Why, you naughty little child, where have you been hiding yourself all this time? We have been hunting for you everywhere," cries Valentine, in rather a nervous, *empressé* manner, as she pounces down upon the child.

"Why, you naughty woman, where have you been hiding *yourself* all this time?" retorts Gladys, pertly. "We have not been hunting for you, though, nor hoping for you either."

The child had never learnt to like Honor's friend.

They went homewards, across the stubble-field, all walking together, and none of them talking very much. I think Stephen made a few remarks appropriate to the beauty of the evening, and Valentine answered them. I don't think Honor spoke at all. It was another silent walk,

like that one which took place after the sea-gull episode.

As they passed Madame Pléon's cottage, Sœur Geneviève came to the door and looked out after them. Gladys ran back a little way, but the sister motioned her on. She did look rather strange, Honor thought, looking back too. And then she recalled Gladys' story. The sister's usually white, ashen face was flushed and agitated. Her lips were trembling, her eyes were full of tears, and yet there she stood in the doorway, a black nun in a black frame, watching them, and looking after them, till they turned an angle of the road, and disappeared out of sight.

"What a very un-nun-like face that nun has," says Stephen. "I don't believe she can really have been intended for a convent life. She has far too much feeling about her."

"You seem to take quite a deep in-

terest in those Brides of the Church," says Valentine, with a laugh. She was the only one of the party who had not looked back at the nun.

"About as much as I take in other brides," replies Mr. Aylmer, gloomily; and then the subject dropped. They had started and used up a good many subjects in this way during their short walk.

"When is your friend, Graf von Reichenau, coming back, Valentine?" asked Honor, suddenly, as they passed the church on the hill, and turned into the Avenue Mont St. Michel. It was the first time Honor had spoken since they started on their homeward stroll.

"I don't know at all," replied Valentine, with a gleam in her steel-grey eyes, which was not lost upon Stephen Aylmer.

"Who was that you were inquiring about just now, Honor?" he asked, as they trudged back along the dingy lane, having safely deposited Valentine at her

own house-door. "Another recently acquired friend?"

"Not of ours, but of Valentine's," replied Honor, in a well modulated voice. "He is a Graf von Reichenau, very rich, I believe. He was here when we first came to Pierreport."

"Ah! then you saw him. What is he like?" asked Stephen, with more eagerness than he had displayed on the subject of the nun.

"*I* will tell you," interposed Gladys, bustling up to him. Whereupon she entered into such a long and minute description of the Graf as he appeared to her that morning in the lane, that it lasted till they reached the Rue Bon Secours.

"A most *graphic* description," says Stephen, laughing. "Only all I can say is, that if the Graf at all resembles it, the longer he stays away the better, I should think. But perhaps you are mis-

taken in thinking him a great friend of Miss Murray's, Honor."

"Perhaps so," said Honor, in rather a tired tone of voice, as they stopped before the *porte cochère* of No. 40. "Wish Stephen good night, Gladys."

But she did not wish him one herself!



CHAPTER XII.

WHERE'S STEPHEN?

"For the rain it raineth every day."

TWELFTH NIGHT.

THAT was the last of the fine days.

The next morning woke in tears. The sky was grey, the streets were greyer still. The little gutters by the roadside had swelled into rapidly rolling rivers. It had rained all night. It looked as if it meant to rain all day. Indeed, as Rosaline had said, the autumn rains were beginning, but who could tell

when they would end? Fine weather must be paid for, just like other good things, and had it not been a splendid season hitherto, she asked of Mademoiselle?

Stephen came in at noon, shaking himself all over like a great wet dog, and laughingly telling Honor this was what the Italians call, "*vero tempo d'amante.*" Honor laughed too, and helped him to pull off his wet great-coat. She thought it was splendid weather. The rain would do good to the country, she reflected benevolently, and for her own part she was not sure she did not like wet days better than fine ones.

He stayed with them all day, talking to the Vicar, and playing with Gladys just as usual. He grew rather restless as the afternoon drew on, however, and disappeared somewhat abruptly, before tea-time.

"What a fine fellow he is growing,"

said Mr. Carmichael, who had seemed to find an especial pleasure in talking to the young man to-day. "I am glad he has such good prospects, and is really taking to work at last. Is it still raining, Honor? How dark the sky is. It is just like one of the old days at home."

Honor, who was standing at the window, gazing down into the street, looked round, and smiled acquiescence. Gladys, however, found occasion to contradict her father's statement.

"In the old days at home, Stephen always stayed to tea," she said emphatically. And no one contradicted her.

He came again the next day, and the next, arriving later and departing earlier each time. Valentine never came at all. It still rained heavily, and indeed was not weather for anyone to venture forth.

"There's Valentine coming down the street," announced Gladys from her window, one day. "And she is coming—yes, she is coming in here."

It was not raining so much that day. There had been a rest for the elements in the morning, and about noon, a pale, sickly gleam of yellowish sunlight had worked its way through the clouds. It was a feeble thing, however, and had soon been caught and disposed of by the wind. It was glimmering faintly when Valentine came in. When she rose to go away it had disappeared, and the sky was shedding its cold grim tears once more.

"Will you lend me your cloak, Honor dear?" she said piteously. "It looked so fine when I started that I came out without either cloak, or umbrella."

Honor fetched her cloak, and Mr. Carmichael offered an umbrella. But Mr. Aylmer who had come in during

the course of her visit, did more. He voluntered to escort her home, and bring back the cloak and umbrella to their respective owners.

"Had you not better lend Miss Murray Gladys' cloak?" he said, laughing, as he watched Honor's well-meant, but vain endeavours to make the cloak that fitted her own tall figure hang less like a court-train round Valentine's small lithe form.

"Honor had better *not*," cried Gladys, in her shrill piping voice.

"Why not, little Queen?" asked Stephen amused.

"Because it is mine, and if Honor gave away anything that belonged to me, I should give up loving her. And Valentine can get home without a cloak, but Honor could not live without my love, you know," said the child, fixing her great brown eyes on Stephen's face.

"What a conceited little Queenie it is!" cried Valentine, stooping down to kiss the child, who however carefully eluded the embrace by hiding her face in her sister's dress. "She thinks Honor could not live without her. Why, what would you do without Honor, Gladys?"

"I shall never have to do without her," replied the child simply, lifting her face for a moment; but with her hands still clinging round her sister. "Honor will never leave me. She loves me too much."

Stephen looked round at Honor eagerly, inquiringly. Is that true? his eyes seemed to say, but his lips said nothing. And how could Honor answer a look? Nay, what need was there for her to do so? Had it not been answered already? The child had spoken for her—the child had chosen.

Stephen looked at her long and

steadily. She made no sign, no movement. She just stood there with the child clinging to her skirts. Her head was bent, her arms hung down straight by her side. She did not even stretch out her hand to him. She scarcely seemed conscious of his presence. She had the child—always the child, and was it not enough? The little figure was standing between them now.

In another part of the room Valentine was making her adieux to Mr. Carmichael.

"Come along," said Stephen hurriedly. "There is no chance of the weather improving—we had best be off."

Then he held the door open for her. The wind closed it behind them. They went forth together into the storm.

There was not much chance of the weather improving certainly; but it was not raining much when they set out.

They had scarcely been gone five minutes, however, when a terrible storm rose, lashing the sea into a white fury, and driving great sheets of water down the already wet, wind-blown streets. Pierreport had seldom or never weathered such a storm before.

All that night the wind howled round the town like a dog, and the window of heaven being open, the windows of the slightly-built, loose-fitting French houses testified to the fact, by rattling and shaking in their frames. All the next day the rain poured down in torrents, till the narrow slanting streets became as so many mountain streams. And then, later in the week, a fog came on—a dense, damp mist, under which the town lay hidden, as by a curtain, for days together, while over the fisherman's quarter, there hung a strange heavy smell, far worse than any amount of fishy fumes.

The fishermen shook their heads, and

crossed themselves, and sighed. No boats could go out; no work could be done: "We shall starve," they said, first of all. And then they said, "We shall die." They were a brave race, strong and hardy, but easily downcast. The priests in their churches offered up continual prayers for fine weather. The good Sisters of Charity trudged hither and thither amidst the poor, despondent people. Sickness had already began to stretch forth its gaunt hand among them, and there was much want and suffering. They were dreary, dismal days for everybody.

The Chaplain and his daughters remained almost entirely within doors at this time. Honor could not go out because she had no cloak; Mr. Carmichael because he was umbrellaless, neither of these borrowed articles having been returned to their owners in the Rue Bon Secours. Neither was anything

heard of the thieves themselves, as Gladys remarked one day. Perhaps they had all been lost in the storm, she added, cheerfully.

The child used to watch for them at first, flattening her nose against the window-pane, and grumbling over Stephen's absence. But all she ever saw was little Gaspard playing about among his father's wigs in the shop opposite, and the sisters going in and out of the convent across the street.

And even from among these, after the first few days, she missed her chief friend, Sœur Geneviève.

"I cannot think what has become of everybody," she would say, shaking her shoulders impatiently. "Sœur Geneviève never goes out now, and Stephen never comes in. Where *is* Stephen, Honor?"

"I don't know, dear," Honor would answer a hundred times a day.

"Where is Aylmer lodging?" said her father, a day or two later. "I must go and fetch my umbrella away, since he does not seem inclined to bring it back."

But Honor did not know Stephen's address. Hitherto they had met every day, and, except in the case of the letter, she had had no occasion to know where he lived. She confessed her ignorance to her father.

"Then you had better send Rosaline out to inquire," said her father, shortly. And Honor did send Rosaline out, but not to inquire Mr. Aylmer's address, only to the nearest *magasin* to buy another umbrella. There are some things, at any rate, that can always be replaced.

"I wish Stephen would come back," grumbled Gladys that evening. "I do so want some one to play with me."

"Won't poor old sister Honor do instead?" said poor Honor, wistfully. And in truth she did feel both very old and

very poor, that night—she, who had once thought in the pride of her heart that she was so rich in happiness and love.

The child, however, declined the offer without thanks.

"No, no," she cried, vehemently, "you never laugh or play with me now. You are almost as dull as papa. I want Stephen. He promised to mend my doll's leg for me. Where *is* Stephen, Honor?"

"My darling, I do not know," cried Honor, heart-brokenly, as she let her face drop down between her hands.

The child came closer. She pulled Honor's hands away from her face: she looked at her gravely with great, curious, solemn eyes: she whispered in an awed tone, under her breath—

"Honor—tell me—is Stephen *dead?*"

Poor Honor! her hands were prisoners: her face, with its changing colour, was like a book, which the child could read off line by line. She tried to say "No," but

her lips refused, for her heart said "Yes." She turned her head away for a second: then she caught her little sister up in her arms, and strained her against her breast. "I have *you* still," she cried, rocking herself to and fro. "Oh, Gladys, God is good. He has let me keep you still."

She knew she had lost the other. She knew that Stephen was dead—the Stephen she had left behind in London, and who had followed her hither—the Stephen who had longed to link his future life with hers, and by whose side she had once dreamt of living and dying. That Stephen was dead, for her, at any rate. She would see him no more. He might live for another, perhaps—but that—that was the worst of it all.

How the knowledge came, she never knew. When David's servants whispered among themselves, the father knew that the child was dead. When the little

sister murmured the word, Honor knew that her lover had left her; less than dead in one sense, more than dead in another. For days she had known he was drifting away from her. Now she knew he was gone.

She did not tremble or cry out. She did not rebel openly against her fate. Her face grew a little whiter, perhaps: her ways a little slower and stiller. But then she was always so pale, so quiet—that was nothing.

While the child was still sick, David lay all night long upon the earth, beseeching the Lord for his little son. But when the child was dead, "he arose, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and did eat bread, and worshipped."

Is there in life a grief greater than this? Our eyes may be sore with weeping, our hearts heavy with fears, but we can bear it all, and even look up and laugh, while the child is alive, while still our prayers

may be granted. . . . But to have to look up to the skies when our star has fallen, to have to eat bread when the child is dead, to have to turn our plaints into praises because our prayers are no longer needed—this, oh this, is surely the bitterness of life, by the side of which death seems sweet indeed.

"Was Aylmer in church this morning, Honor?" asked the Chaplain on Sunday, as he and his daughter struggled home through the wind and the rain.

"I did not see him, papa," replied Honor, catching her breath.

"No more did I, though I looked out for him," returned her father, with rather a grave face. "I wanted to see him, because the old pew-opener told me Miss Murray's father was dead—had died quite suddenly on Thursday last; and I thought perhaps Aylmer might know whether this was the case or not."

"Colonel Murray dead—on Thursday last!" gasped Honor, and her voice went echoing shrilly through the wind and the drenching rain, like the wild weird notes of a pibroch played on some far-away mountain side.

And in truth it was a lament she made, and made with reason too—for Thursday had been the day of the great storm; and the last time she had seen or spoken to Valentine Murray.

CHAPTER XIII.

SŒUR GENEVIÈVE.

"Everywhere one treads upon graves; but see, the grass is strewn with daisies."—HEINRICH SCHWARZ.

THEN the Chaplain's door in the Rue Bon Secours closed behind them, Stephen and Valentine went slowly down the long dark staircase, and out into the streets beyond. It was not raining much at the time; but the wind blew roughly against them, driving great gusts of blinding mist in their faces, and impeding their progress not a little. Stephen opened the umbrella, and offered Valentine his arm.

They did not talk much. People seldom do when their hearts are full. It is best to keep the mouth shut on such occasions, lest an unexpected word should cause the heart to overflow. A remark or two about the rain, or con-concerning some song they had heard together, or some chance meeting which had taken place last night, and that was all. "You won't have such weather as this, in India," Valentine had said softly, as they started. "Nor such a companion either." Stephen had answered under his breath. And then they had walked on in silence—a tall man with a big umbrella, a little woman nestling under it, and holding up her cloak. She had not accepted the proffered arm.

It began to rain heavily again. The wind seemed to be rising with each step they took. Valentine and her cloak were sources of annoyance to each other. She struggled, it straggled behind. She

turned a corner sharply, half of it was left upon the other side. Stephen caught the flapping ends and folded them round her.

"You must let me help you, after all," he said; "or do you really prefer battling with the elements all alone?"

"I have always been alone," she answered, in a low, sad voice. "I do not like it, but I am used to it."

Stephen was touched. He was sorry for the girl, whose lonely life, as he imagined it, seemed so different a thing from Honor's love-spread life, as he thought he knew it. But he said nothing more. He only drew her hand gently across his arm.

As they reached the foot of the steep, narrow, twisting street that leads to Mont St. Michel, the storm burst in all its fury.

"Shall we turn in there, and wait a little?" said Stephen, pointing to the

nearest house, the door of which stood invitingly open.

Valentine nodded, and ran up the flight of steps leading to the door. Just inside the doorway a little boy was standing. He had a round, curly head, and preternaturally solemn eyes. He was staring up and down the street, as he murmured out something about "*le p'tit Remy*," as Valentine brushed past him. That young lady however did not listen to what he said.

The room which she entered was low-roofed and dark, and struck her as peculiarly chill and cheerless. Usually French homes, even of the poorest description, are full of clatter and chatter, if not of cheerfulness. But here all was still, and dim, and dreary. It was impossible at first to discern anything. By-and-by, however, (her eyes growing used to the darkness, as our bodies do to pain, or our souls to sorrow) she managed

to make out the figure of an old woman crouching in a corner before a fireless stove, and in a room beyond, the door of which was also open, that of a younger woman, sitting on a chair, with a baby on her lap. The old woman, who had thrown her apron over her head, removed it for a moment and nodded a surly welcome. The younger woman stared at Valentine, but took no further notice. She was rocking the baby to and fro on her lap; but she was not singing to it, as mothers usually sing when they hush their little ones to sleep. Perhaps it was asleep already.

The rain splashed on. The little, solemn-eyed boy still stood in the doorway. Stephen and Valentine looked out over his head, at the streaming streets.

"Cans't thou not see her yet, Georges?" asked the old woman, once or twice from her stove corner. She spoke through her

apron, and her voice sounded strangely thick and muffled.

"*Pas encore, gran'-mère,*" the boy replied invariably.

At last he pushed in his curly head, and announced in a tone of mournful excitement. "She is coming, *gran'-mère.* She is turning down the street from the Avenue St. Michel. She is near now. But oh! she looks so strange, I dare not call her, *gran'-mère!*" and the little boy ran back into the room.

The old woman rose, and went to the door. Valentine drew further back. Whoever was coming in was sure to be as wet as Gideon's fleece.

"Sœur Geneviève, Sœur Geneviève!" cried the old woman, waving her hand, and raising her voice shrilly, till it sounded above the wind, like a raven's shriek. "Come in, come in. I sent for you early this morning."

"Do you want anything of me?" re-

turned a soft sweet voice, as it might be a dove murmuring, outside.

"Come in," repeated the old woman, imperatively. "Little Remy is dead. He caught the fever yesterday, and died at daybreak this morning."

"At daybreak—this morning," echoed the voice outside, with a strange, sudden tremor in it. "Did you say at daybreak—this morning, *mère* Duval?"

"Yes—yes—at daybreak, or thereabouts," muttered the old woman, impatiently. "And his mother has been mute with grief ever since. Come in and speak to her, Sœur Geneviève."

"Ah! his mother—his poor mother," returned the voice, drearily. "May the Mother of all mothers, who saw her own Son die—may our Lady of Seven Sorrows, who endured all our poor, weak, womanhood's pangs and pain—now stoop down, and comfort one more of her many mourning daughters."

"Nay, but you must comfort her too," cried the old woman, who did not seem to be much comforted herself by the sister's sad, solemn blessing. "No one can put the taste of comfort into one's mouth as well as you can, Sœur Geneviève. I think you pave the way for Our Lady."

"That is not well said, *mère* Duval," replied the Sister, reprovingly. "It is always Our Lady who guides the steps of her daughters. But I will come to you in the morning. To-night I cannot. I have still many sick to visit. See—a long list, and—and I am so tired, *mère* Duval," and the poor trembling voice almost broke down as it spoke.

"But one little moment," pleaded the old woman, in all the selfishness of maternal love and sorrow. "One little moment just to lift the dear, dead child out of its mother's arms. See, how she sits there, looking at it, as though looks

would give it breath again. She will not let anyone touch it—not the husband that begat it—not the mother that bare her as a babe herself. But you will doubtless prevail. Oh, come in to her, Sœur Geneviève, come in, and go to her, lest her life or her reason fail, and I be left childless in mine old age."

Thus urged, Sœur Geneviève could refuse no longer. She came up the steps, slowly and wearily. She certainly seemed, as she had said, very tired. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips were white, her eyes were dim and sunken, and yet in her face there shone a wonderful light—a light such as there might be in the faces of those angels who look down from heaven on the sinners who repent on earth. Valentine glanced at her as she passed.

She did not see Valentine, for the dimness of the room blinded her, as it had blinded the girl herself, when she had

first entered the house. She passed on into the inner room. She knelt down beside the poor bereaved young mother. She touched her gently. Then she began to speak.

"Dear sister," she said in a sweet low voice, "dear sorrowing sister, in the name of the Blessed Mother of all mourners, let me speak one word of sympathy with you."

The poor young mother looked round piteously. Her bosom heaved a little. She held the child closer against it. But she said nothing.

"I should not dare to speak otherwise," Sœur Geneviève went on, "for a mother's grief is as deep and sacred as a mother's love, and it seems to me nothing human can reach, or touch it—and yet—my sister—there are griefs worse than yours in the world to-day," and the sweet, sad voice began to tremble again.

Mère Duval's daughter shook her head. "He will never—walk—now," she said slowly, as if the world could not contain a greater grief than that.

"But he will fly to meet you," replied Sœur Geneviève, catching the idea. "He will welcome you home to heaven, when all your walking and working upon earth will be finished—he will be beside you there always, your dear child-angel. If he had lived to be a man on earth, he might have left you. You might have lost him altogether, perhaps. People so often lose the very thing they love best. But a child in heaven is safe. He cannot stray away from you there. Oh, poor mother, if you knew all the trials and temptations of manhood, how hardly they press, how sorely they harass and perplex—even you, I think, would scarcely wish your son to be alive again——"

Thus she talked on in the simple,

soothing fashion that was common to her, and which had won her so much love among the rough hard-spoken fisher-folks. In all their troubles they sent for Sœur Geneviève, and she came to them literally with healing on her lips. They regarded her as an angel, whose song was, "Peace to the sad ones, health to the sick, and to the weary, rest!" She was always so pitiful, so tender, so quick to see, so ready to help.

But to-day she was even more than all that. To-day the angel's voice was hoarse, and yet her song thrilled her hearer's hearts—she was not only infinitely pitiful, as her way was, but thoroughly sympathetic as people rarely are—to-day she was feeling pain, as well as seeing it.

The poor young mother seemed to know this too. The gentle words went straight as arrows to her heart. She rose a little. She trembled all over.

"Take him, *ma sœur*," she sobbed, as she let the little dead child slip out of her arms into Sœur Geneviève's lap.

Sœur Geneviève bent over the little waxen face. She made the sign of the cross on its forehead, and murmured a prayer. Then she turned to lay it down, for the last time, in its little wooden cradle.

In so doing, she caught sight of Valentine standing in the doorway.

Her face flushed suddenly. Her hands began to tremble.

She stooped down, lower and lower still. She laid the little child in its cradle. She folded its tiny hands across its breast—*they* were still enough; but hers were trembling. She drew the coverlid across its face; and then, crossing the room, she touched Valentine's shoulder.

"Are you—Colonel Charles Murray's daughter?" she gasped in a low hurried

voice. "If so—go home at once; he—he—may want you."

Valentine started and turned round. But before she could speak, Sœur Geneviève had caught her in her arms, kissed her once, passionately, fondly, put her away, and disappeared out of the house, and down the steps.

It had all happened so quickly, that Stephen who was still watching the weather, saw nothing of it. "Are you frightened?" he said, suddenly turning round, and looking with some surprise at his companion's white face. "The storm will be over soon, I think."

"No—I am not frightened," replied Valentine, but her teeth chattered as she spoke. "Did you see that nun? How strange she looked. I think she must be mad. And the child here is dead—perhaps it died of some infectious fever. I am afraid of fevers. Had we not better go home? Yes, do let us go home, please,

Mr. Aylmer." And she ran hastily down the little flight of steps.

Stephen followed, and the next minute they were floundering about in the street once more, rain-drenched, wind-tossed, like ships at sea.

Valentine struggled manfully, or rather womanfully for a time. But she fell back exhausted at last, and Mr. Aylmer was obliged almost to carry her up the steepest part of the street, and over the roughest, bleakest bit of the lane.

He felt a strange tenderness come over him, as he looked at the girl who leant against his arm, like a trembling flower blown there by the wind. It was a new sensation to him. Honor had never been frightened, or needed such support when he was with her; which on the whole was lucky, perhaps, for he certainly could not have carried her in his arms, as he was carrying Valentine. Honor was almost as tall as himself, whereas

Valentine was such a little thing, scarcely bigger than Gladys. He thought of Honor as he had seen her last, standing upright, with the child clinging to her skirts, and the home of love and happiness closing round her. And then he thought of Valentine, beaten and buffetted about by all manner of storms and tempests, whose home was neither loving nor good, as he well knew, and who was "always alone," as she had said so pathetically of herself.

"Will you come in and see my father?" said Valentine, hospitably, as they reached the garden-gate at last. "He went out very early this morning, but I daresay he is back by this time."

Stephen looked down ruefully at his splashed garments. "I will come to-morrow," he said. "Or to-night, if it ceases raining." Then he unlatched the little gate, and let her pass through alone.

It did not cease raining, but Stephen went in, and saw Valentine's father long before to-morrow, or to-night either.



CHAPTER XIV.

WHERE STEPHEN WAS.

"There's blood between us, love, my love—
There's father's blood, there's brother's blood.
And blood's a bar I cannot pass."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

STEPHEN AYLMER had scarcely turned away from the little garden-gate, when a sudden piercing shriek rang out sharply above the wind and the pelting rain. The young man stood still to listen. There was another and another. They certainly issued from *Maison Numéro quatre*. As the third cry fell upon his ear, Stephen hastened back, and pushed open the house-door.

"What is it ?" he shouted, groping his way up the dusky staircase.

But no one answered his shout.

On the landing he paused. The door of Colonel Murray's *salon* was closed, but he could hear within a sound of voices. The shrieks, whatever they meant, or from whence they came, had ceased.

Stephen knocked, but his knuckles received no more attention than his voice had done previously. At last he ventured to open the door himself.

The little room seemed to him to be full of people. It was beginning to get dark, but he could distinguish plainly enough the figures of Mademoiselle Madelon and Madame Pulliot, standing in the embrasure of the window, with their noses very close together. There was a man standing beside them. He held a letter in his hand at which he glanced now and then, while the old women chattered away and nodded their

heads at each other. "It is as I always said it would be," muttered one. And the other signalled assent. They both looked very much perturbed.

Valentine was kneeling beside the sofa. Her arms were stretched out over it, and her face was buried in her hands. A *sœur de charité* stood beside her. She was an ugly woman, with gentle eyes, and by her dress, evidently belonged to the same convent as Sœur Geneviève. After a time, she too knelt down beside the sofa, on which lay—Stephen could not make out at first what it was that lay there—a shapeless mass—a figure of a man with a cloak thrown over it—the face of Colonel Murray, livid, ghastly, with staring eyes and gaping mouth, but sightless, speechless for evermore.

It told its own story—a black story on a blank page. Valentine had snatched off the cloth which had covered the face, and read the story shrieking. Stephen was

reading it now. He knew what it meant? He knew that Colonel Murray had shot himself; had ended by his own faltering hand the life he had ruined by his own faithless heart. It seemed to him like a sudden warning.

He had plenty of time to notice all this, for no one took any notice of him. The old women talked together excitedly. Valentine knelt beside the sofa in speechless, senseless agony and fear.

"His face will haunt me now," said Madame Pulliot, with a shudder

Mademoiselle Madelon shuddered too. "I wish Mademoiselle had not uncovered it again," she said. The man who was reading the letter looked up.

"His mind wandered a good deal, you say?" he remarked, in a professional manner, and Stephen, looking at him, recognized a certain Dr. Lévy, who had dined with Monsieur le Colonel Murray one night when he had been there. "Can you

remember anything he said, Mesdames?"

Mademoiselle Madelon came to the fore instantly.

"Every word, Monsieur," she replied readily. "For a short time after Monsieur left us, Monsieur le Colonel remained silent, but he very soon became delirious. 'Are you a ghost, Edmée,' he said, clutching hold of Sœur Geneviève, who was watching beside him. 'I thought it was all a dream,' he sighed. 'How did you come here? Are you alive or dead? Are we in heaven or hell?' Sœur Geneviève tried to soothe him by repeating a prayer, but she must have been frightened too, I suppose, for her voice failed her and she stopped suddenly, went up to him, and told him that Sœur Cathérine had gone to fetch a priest, who would be here soon. I don't want a priest,' he answered, 'I have confessed and received absolution.' And then he raised himself suddenly and fell forward upon Sœur Geneviève's neck, and

when she lifted his head he was dead. Oh, it was a dreadful ending!" And the poor little woman seemed to be quite overcome by the recollection of it.

"Ah! he wandered a good deal, I see," said the doctor. "Does it occur to you that his mind was at all troubled, previous to this event?"

Mademoiselle Madelon was about to speak again, but this time, Madame Pulliot, doubtless out of compassion for her friend's condition, took up the parable.

"Monsieur!" she said, solemnly. "It is my belief Monsieur le Colonel was greatly troubled in his mind of late. He told me once he had seen a ghost in the lane. He shook like a leaf when he received a letter the other day—that very letter, in fact, which Monsieur now holds in his hand. He used to kiss, as if it were a living thing, that little velvet-covered book Monsieur found in his breast pocket, and then throw it away, and then pick it up and

kiss again. He ate nothing. Monsieur is acquainted with the artistic nature of Mademoiselle Madelon's *plats*—Monsieur le Colonel sent them away untouched. He drank double, however, to make up. For the rest, Monsieur knows his way of life as well as we do. Now——"

"For the rest, I think, this letter accounts," said the doctor, interrupting the garrulous landlady.

"What letter?" asked Valentine, suddenly, in a hollow voice.

They all started as she spoke. They had altogether forgotten her presence. The doctor was ready, however.

"A most amazing letter your father was evidently reading, just when he met with this deplorable *accident*," he replied, with an emphasis on the last word.

"Where is it? give it to me," said Valentine.

"Not just now, my dear young lady. It is necessary I should retain it in my pos-

session for the present," replied the doctor, kindly. Then, in a lower tone, he added, "Get her away, somehow, Sœur Cathérine."

Sœur Cathérine passed her arm round the girl's waist. "Come," she said, and Valentine went. She was stunned and stupified, and had no strength to resist. Madame Pulliot and Mademoiselle Madelon also withdrew themselves.

"How did it happen?" asked Stephen, gravely, when he and the doctor were left alone.

"How do such things usually happen?" returned Dr. Lévy, looking at him keenly. "A solitary spot, daybreak, a flash, a report, and all is finished; a life is blown out, like a light in a gust of wind. This one would have finished this also, but that the shot missed its aim —was turned aside by the metal clasp of a little book our *pauvre ami* carried in his breast-pocket. And so the end was de-

layed for an hour or two; for what purpose it were vain to inquire. Sœur Geneviève and Sœur Cathérine, going to early mass at Petit Pierreport, found him lying on the sands, bleeding to death. One of them came off for me at once, the other, Sœur Geneviève, watched beside the wounded man. I brought him back in my gig, but I knew all was over for him. I left him here. Other patients were waiting for me; *mère* Duval had already sent for me twice to visit her *petit fils*. That pretty child was dead when I arrived there, and when I returned here Colonel Murray was dead also. That is all I can tell you. This, perhaps, may explain the rest," and he placed the letter in Stephen's hands.

Stephen took it, but hesitated to open it.

"Read it, *mon ami*," said the Doctor, busying himself about the corpse. "You were a friend of this poor fellow's (whose

soul the Blessed Virgin release from purgatory), and his enemies must know all soon. Besides, some *histoire* must be told to Mademoiselle, and I should desire you should charge yourself with that."

Thus urged, Stephen opened the missive. It was a long letter, written in a weak, abrupt, pathetic way, which here and there rose to absolute poetry and dignity of expression. Stephen read it through slowly.

"Mein Herr Colonel,

"Herman von Reichenau is about to be avenged! Do you start as you see these words? Then you need read no further.

"Nevertheless, I must write on. I will be as brief as I can. But I must go back a little way into the past in order to explain the present.

"My childhood, as you know, was

overshadowed by anxiety concerning the fate of my only brother—the best-beloved child of my parents. This boy, who was many years older than myself, had been sent to study in France. Whilst there, he had contracted bad habits, lost a large sum of money in gambling, and finally disappeared. All doubt concerning his fate was, however, solved at last, by his death at Monaco, under somewhat disreputable circumstances. I was about eight years old when this sad event occurred.

"The blow killed my mother, and shortened the days of my father. He lived, however, till I was eighteen years of age. During that time he had learnt some more particulars concerning my brother's last years. He had been led astray, poor young fellow. There had been a tempter, an evil counsellor, a betrayer. My father set himself to discover this person. He would have justice, he

said; his Herman's memory should be avenged. With his dying breath he charged me to pursue the same course.

"I was young and inexperienced, and scarcely knew more than the name of the village in which my brother had lived. I journeyed thither, however, but met with little success. All the people who had been there in his time seemed to be either dead or gone. The matter was forgotten.

"The *pasteur* with whom my brother had lived was dead. His servant, Pierrot Pléon by name, was dead also. This man, to whom certain suspicions were attached, had gone off to sea about the time of my brother's disappearance. He had returned since, married, and died, but no one knew where his widow lived. It seemed a hopeless task.

"Nevertheless, I pursued it unremit-

tingly for ten years, more; indeed, until the very moment I met you in Paris in the spring of this year. You will remember, Herr Colonel, the strangeness of that encounter. You heard my name, and spoke to me. Your daughter was with you. It was a fatal moment for both of us.

"You will remember how we talked of the old days, and you told me of my brother's life with the *pasteur* of Belle-Fontaine, how dull it was, and monotonous, how easy it would have been for any one to gain an influence over him, and lead him into evil ways. You promised to help me. We swore together that Herman von Reichenau should be avenged.

"You will remember how you told me you had warned my brother, and had striven to win him back by counsel and help; how you too had been a sufferer by his misconduct. And then,

by degrees, you unfolded to me the amount of his debts to you. It was large—enormous, but it must be paid; my father would have wished it. These were debts of honour, and must needs be paid, even though Schloss Reichenau had to be sold to furnish forth the money. They have been paid; you know how.

"You will remember my love for Valentine—how foolish—how mad I was about her. She did not love me; no, indeed; she mocked and jeered at me day after day. But that did not matter, so long as I might love her.

"It is all over now, past as a dream at dawn. And the only scrap of comfort in it is, that she will not suffer as I am suffering. Perhaps, indeed, she will even be glad.

"It has all happened so strangely. Such great things hang on such little points. A single thread will unravel a

whole web, if only one can get hold of the right end.

"I did not seek this thread. It fell into my hands in the strangest manner. We had left Paris, and were now together at Pierreport. You had promised to give me Valentine, but before I married her, I felt my brother's debts must be paid. Part of the property must be sold for that purpose. I saw that clearly. It cost me something to decide this, but it must be done. We settled to travel to Frankfort together, and make the necessary arrangements. Do you remember the morning we started? The sun was shining, Valentine was singing, we strolled up and down the lane, listening to her. By-and-by you turned away, and I remained alone.

"Somehow, suddenly, as I turned round, I stumbled up against a country-woman, who was passing through the lane, with a basket under her arm. The

basket was over-turned, and some of its contents fell out, a letter among the rest. I picked it up, and offered it to a young English lady who happened to be passing by at that moment (how well I remember it all!) but she refused it. I then glanced at the direction. It was addressed to Madame Pléon. I saw no further; the name Pléon seemed to burn into my brain. It was the name of the man who was said to have ruined my brother's life, and destroyed the peace of my home—the name that was now, alas! about to rob me of the love of my heart.

"I ran after the woman, and restored to her her letter. I spoke a few words to her, but she seemed scared and frightened, and I had not time to say much. You called me at that moment, and we travelled away together, and put the finishing stroke to our business. I said nothing about it, but all the time the

name Pléon, Pléon, kept ringing in my ears. I don't know why I said nothing about it. I certainly had not the smallest suspicion of the truth then.

"When you left me to return to Pierreport, I went back once more to Belle-Fontaine. I had been there so often before, I scarcely hoped to make any further discoveries this time. But having a clue to any matter is like knowing one's way out of a labyrinth. I had found the right key; the difficulty was to make it turn in the lock, which had grown so old, and stiff, and rusty with the lapse of years.

"I went to work at once. I described Madame Pléon's appearance, and her manner of speech, which was undoubtedly that of the people round. They, too, seemed more disposed to help me this time. They hunted up and gave me the address of Madame Pléon's sister, who had formerly been a servant at the village

inn, and was now married to an *employé* on the Marseilles station. She might help me, they said.

"Thither I went, and there I found a prosperous *mère de famille*, who yet had not forgotten her maiden days. Her mother was dead, and her sister too, she had thought. Still, the person I described must resemble greatly her dear Josette. Was Pierreport a very long way from Marseilles? She remembered Pléon, oh yes. He was a good, stupid dolt, but he had saved her mother's life at the cost of his own, and she loved his memory for that.

She remembered the young German gentleman who had studied *chez M. le pasteur Berryer;* and here she looked sympathetic. She remembered the Englishman, who had lodged at the 'Lion d'Or' at the same time, and here words seemed to fail her.

"At last the truth came out—the truth,

that is, as far as she knew it. It was not Pléon who had been to blame about the sum of money which was lost. It was not Pléon who had led the German boy into low company and evil ways, who had taught him to gamble and drink, and break his parents' hearts. Pléon would be incapable of such things. He was stupid, but he was honest.

"He might have been implicated in the matter in some slight way, perhaps, for the arch-tempter himself, in a man's form, was lodging that year at the 'Lion d'Or,' and working mischief amongst them all. It was *he* who had led my brother astray, he who had hinted most frequently at poor Pléon's guilt, and who helped him eventually to a berth on board some merchant ship; and *his* name was—Colonel Murray. I can scarcely write it even yet.

"The web was unravelled. Truth was staring me in the face, and yet I could not

bring myself to believe it. Madame Pléon's sister saw my doubts. She had another proof. She showed an old stamped letter, which she had picked up one day at the 'Lion d'Or.' 'I tied up some ribbons in it once,' she said, 'and when I untied them again, Josette saw the paper, and bade me keep it.' This letter was written in French, but addressed to a well-known Polish patriot. Its purport was to explain the writer's inability to advance further sums to a cause he had already served, 'both by his arm and his purse.' It requested the recipient to find a sailor's post for a young man, whom it was desirable to remove from his present situation. It was dated Lion d'Or, Coulanges, January 21, 18—, and signed by a signature which had become well known to me within the last few weeks.

"I could doubt no longer. Even Madame Pléon, to whom I paid a flying

visit three nights ago, showing her your photograph, which Valentine had given me in happier days, even her strange looks and manner, and hasty incoherent words, were scarcely needed to confirm her sister's statement. I knew all now. I knew that a fraud had been practised on me, that I had been called upon to pay false debts. I knew I must relinquish my beloved Valentine. That was the bitterest part of all. But my brother's betrayer could never be my wife's father. My own father's spirit would stand up before the altar, and forbid the union.

"'I am glad,' Madame Pléon had said, that night. And then she said, 'I am sorry. You must not expose this bad man, Monsieur. The memory of the dead wants no clearing, because he who is dead was never doubted by those who loved him. But the living may be pained

still. There is one — still — oh, *jeune Monsieur*, for her sake, be silent.'

"Who did she mean, mein Herr Colonel? Can you guess? Was she alluding to my best-beloved Valentine? I scarcely think so; and yet, for her sake, for her whom I shall love eternally, but see no more on this side of the grave, I will be silent, and my brother's blood shall be avenged by my own bleeding heart.

"I will be silent, but on one condition only, namely that you return to me immediately that sum of money which was wrung out of me under false pretences. That sum was handed over so recently, you cannot yet have disposed of it. I give you fifteen days from this date. Should the transfer not be made within that period, I shall not consider myself bound any longer to withhold my vengeance, or restrain the course of the law. This, at least, you cannot deem unreason-

able on the part of one you have so deeply wounded as

"OTTO VON REICHENAU."

When Stephen came to the end of this letter, it seemed to him as though he had travelled a long distance, and seen some way into other peoples' lives. "And this is the end," he said, looking down at the dead man. "He must have been hard pressed, poor fellow. Did he say nothing sensible and collected before his death?" he asked, going back, and gathering up the story, bit by bit, as a wave of the sea will go flowing, backwards and forwards, before it covers up the whole of the beach.

"He said nothing but what you heard Mademoiselle Madelon repeat just now," replied the doctor, who had been in and out of the room many times during that long journeying of Stephen's thoughts. "He may, of course, have uttered a sen-

tence or two as he lay bleeding to death on the sands, but they must have been of the same nature, and Sœur Geneviève, whom I questioned on this point, seems to have heard nothing, or at least to have understood nothing. Poor soul, how ill she looked to-day. I am glad she consented to go back to the convent, and leave Sœur Cathérine to finish her sad work here. She is the best nurse in Pierreport, and I don't want to lose her just now, when the sickly season is commencing. But this — *this* was an accident, you understand," added the doctor, abruptly. And as he spoke he nodded to the door, behind which Valentine had disappeared.

Stephen nodded too. He understood.

"You will come with me, and see it done," said the doctor. And so it chanced that Stephen Aylmer and Dr. Levy were the only mourners who followed Charles Murray to his uncon-

secrated grave in a foreign land. It was the night of the great storm, and the wind howled, and the rain came pelting down, but louder than all sounded the hollow *thud* of "ashes to ashes, and dust to dust," as the earth fell in upon the suicide's coffin.

The next day Stephen and Valentine met again. He had gone up to inquire after her, and Madame Pulliot, meeting him on the stairs, had ushered him into the *salon*, where the girl sat alone. She was dressed in a hastily-made black dress, out of which her face looked white and changed; and she was turning over a pile of papers, in a hopeless, dreary sort of way, when Stephen entered.

"I cannot understand them," she said, looking up to him pitifully. "They seem to be all bills." Mr. Aylmer took the papers out of her hand.

"May I look at them?" he said,

gently. "I should like to help you if I could."

"I do not know," she said, faltering, "I think perhaps I ought to make them out by myself. I am more alone than ever now, you know."

"Not more alone!" cried Stephen, passionately. "Say less alone, Valentine. Come with me to India, and help to make my life there less lonely than it promises now to be."

Afterwards, when these two "made out" the papers together, it was found that they were not "all bills," as Valentine had imagined. The larger and more pressing claims had all been defrayed out of the Graf's money. The remainder had been expended upon Valentine's so-called trousseau. It was well, perhaps, after all, that she should have secured a husband upon whom to bestow the results of so much pain and sorrow, anxiety and foresight.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW THE NEWS CAME.

"Not a word to each other: we kept the pace,
Neck to neck, stride to stride, never changing our places."
ROBERT BROWNING.

THE rain ceased at last; "the foundations of the deep, and the windows of heaven were stopped;" fair weather came round again, as most things will, if we wait long enough for them.

"Shall we go and see Valentine?" said Honor to Gladys, the very first day they went out after "the rains." "Her

father is dead, you know. She might like us to go to her."

"No, no!" replied the child quickly. "I don't want to see Valentine. Let us go to the *sous-préfet's* garden." And to the *sous-préfet's* garden they went.

It was not an attractive spot. There was a staring white house at one end, with green shutters, and innumerable balconies, and a big tricolor always floating from the roof; and then, in front, a stiff trim garden, full of paths that led nowhere, and mouldy-looking grottoes, and noseless statues, damp, moss-grown, and meaningless. Gladys flitted about this dingy place, like a sunbeam that had lost its way in a cavern. Honor sat down on a bench under an acacia tree, and watched the waves as they came rolling in, ridge upon ridge, furrow after furrow. Was it pain or joy that they were rolling towards her? Somehow she felt strangely expectant to-day.

Suddenly Gladys came flying back to her sister.

"Stephen is here—and Valentine is here," she panted. "They are coming down the path to the acacia-tree. They are walking together, arm in arm."

Honor started up from her seat as the child spoke. Her face was very white; her lips were trembling. "Let us go away," she gasped. "No, I mean let us go on—and meet them."

Whichever she meant, she had no choice now. Stephen and Valentine were close at hand by this time. She could have touched either of them by merely stretching out her arm. They did not see her, however, being entirely engrossed with their own thoughts, and they would both probably have passed her by unnoticed, had not little Gladys rushed upon them.

"Stephen, Stephen," she cried, clasping her hands round the young fellow's

knee, and holding him fast. "Where have you been all this time, and why have you never come to mend my doll's leg ?"

Stephen thus accosted, stopped short, and looked up. He hated a scene, but he expected one now, had been expecting one in fact ever since that day last week, when by his tongue as well as by his lips he had made such an event probable. He only hoped it might be a short one.

Honor however stood up still and calm. Her hands were trembling a little, but she had them together in her muff, so that was of no consequence. She was greeting Valentine quietly and coldly.

"Are you very much surprised, Honor ?" said that young person excitedly.

"Surprised at what ?" asked Honor pitilessly.

"To hear—to see—Mr. Aylmer and me walking together thus." Something in

Honor's manner seemed to suppress her foolish excitement. It was like the sea, with its swelling silence and deep undercurrents, swallowing up and drowning the little babbling stream that ran with it. "We were coming to tell you about it this afternoon, were we not—Stephen?" (she had the grace to pause a little before uttering the name). "Or perhaps you had guessed already?"

Stephen did not answer. He was bending down and talking to Gladys in a rapid, meaningless sort of way, much resented by the child. He did not even look at Honor.

Women are braver in many ways than men are, I think. Their vanity may be mortally wounded, their hearts ache wearily, their love lie bleeding, aye dying before them, and yet they will draw themselves up to their full height, and "triumphing in their woman's empire," will trample the dead love under foot,

and throw the dust in the eyes of the passers by. Honor could have faced the world at such a moment. She was fighting, it is true, and fighting single-handed; but she had about her the calm conscious dignity of a conqueror.

"No, I did not guess," she said coldly and quietly. "I never should have guessed, I think; but I wish you joy all the same."

"Honor is in one of her iciest moods," said Valentine to Stephen as they turned away. "Perhaps she thinks we ought to have told her sooner."

Perhaps!

But more likely she was too much bewildered to think, too much stunned to feel; for the Great Physician is merciful, and as we pass through the terrible operations of life—as, one by one, some such awful wrenches have to be made—He administers to us a sort of mental

chloroform, whereby our sense of pain is deadened for a time.

But oh! the awakening out of that chloroform—oh! the gathering of oneself together, as it were, when the sedative of the shock has passed away. That is the moment of agony, intensest, supremest, most terrible. And yet, we who live, hold life, even life born of anguish, better than death—sweet and painless though it be. The Laplander rubs his frost-bitten hand with snow, till it throbs and tingles again, for he knows that aching is a proof of life. The numbness signified death. It is true, but strange, that we would rather be alive to suffering than dead to pain—rather wake and work than sleep on in the stillest, sweetest, soundest dreams. It is strange, but true, for it is a sign that man's soul can never die; it is a proof, not only by faith, but also according to the law, of man's immortality.

Honor however might sleep on a little longer. Her time for waking had not yet come. The snow had not yet fallen wherewith she should rub back to life that poor frost-bitten heart of hers.

"You must tell papa where we went to-day, and who we met," she said to Gladys suddenly that evening. It was an unusual suggestion on her part. They were not, as a family, much given to discussing the little events of their every day life.

Mr. Carmichael looked up from his book. He was not much interested in it. It was a translation of some modern French philosophical work, and Mr. Carmichael disliked translations. He always regarded the translator in the light of a dishonest tradesman, who not only merely skims the surface of his work, without stirring up the sense that lies underneath, but also dilutes it with a plentiful supply of his own watery thoughts. Such trans-

lations always seemed to him like a bottle of German waters, which have been corked up, and sent spinning over land and sea, till their virtues are well-nigh danced out of them. But if one is too great an invalid to travel, and yet desires to drink of these healing springs, what else can one do? And if one is lame in French, and yet desires to get alongside of the literature of the nation, how can one manage it, except by the help of such crutches as these? Mr. Carmichael was accordingly condemned to the use of crutches.

Gladys told her story simply enough. Her father listened carelessly at first, but more and more attentively as the child went on, "Valentine was all dressed in black, you know, but she did not seem very sad, for she was talking to Stephen as she came walking along, and hanging on his arm. They neither of them saw us at first, but I caught hold of Stephen's

leg, and made him stop. Then I asked him where he had been all this long time, but he would not tell me—but—but—Valentine told Honor, she was going to marry Stephen, papa."

"To marry Stephen," repeated papa, with a start that seemed to send all his old blood rushing into his face. "I hoped—I fancied—I mean I thought—they were thinking of someone else—both of them."

CHAPTER XVI.

SO FEARFUL WERE THEY OF INFECTION.

"And every evening when she said her prayers,
She prayed to be delivered from the sin,
Of loving aught on earth with such a love."

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

IT is curious how soon we get used to pain. We kick a little at first, but we soon learn to keep our legs still, till at last it is only some rare and unexpected pleasurable emotion that can cause us to start, and spring up on our feet once more.

Honor's sleep lasted some time. She seemed to be in sort of mesmeric condi-

tion. She felt it herself; but she could not help it. Gladys felt it too, and tried to wake her up, by a hundred pretty childish ways and wiles. But she failed. Nothing roused Honor, nothing interested her now. The father was asleep too. It was a dull time for the little one.

At last, one day, she found a subject that roused them both; at any rate for a time.

"Honor, Honor, little Gaspard is dead, and they have come to carry him away!" she cried, running into the breakfast-room one bleak, black, December morning. Her father and his book were already assembled at the table, and Honor was standing up, and pouring out the coffee.

"Please turn my seat, Honor. I don't like to look out. They are carrying him away in a box, Rosaline says. And may I have some jam with my bread-and butter?" the child went on, stringing

her thoughts together like daisies, and taking up her position with her back to the window, and opposite her usual seat.

Honor put down her coffee-pot, and silently moved her little sister's cup and plate from one side of the table round to the other. Then she went to the window, and looked out.

The *coiffeur's* shop was shut, and a large piece of black cloth was nailed across the door. At the moment Père François, the kind-faced priest of the parish, was creeping in under the black barrier. He lifted it for a second, then let it fall behind him.

"Poor little fellow," said Honor, going back to her seat. "He must have died rather suddenly, for I saw him playing outside the shop only a day or two ago."

"He died yesterday," said Gladys, authoritatively.

"How do you know, dear?" asked

Honor. Her thoughts were wandering away from the dead child already.

"Rosaline told me. Something grew in his throat; and it swelled, and it swelled, and at last it strangled him. And Lili's little brother had the same thing in his throat, and he is dead too," continued the child, conversationally.

"In his throat!" cried Honor, shrilly, while something vague and terrible seemed suddenly to rise and swell in her own throat. "What could it be in his throat, Gladys?"

"They called it by some long name," replied the child, delighted to have found a topic of conversation at last. "Dip—dip— no, I can't remember the rest, but they will tell you if you ask them, Honor."

"They—who?"

"Rosaline and Lili. She is in the kitchen this morning, too."

"In the kitchen—and her little brother

dead of diphtheria!" cried Honor, wide awake now. "Papa, papa, did not my brother Ted die of diphtheria?"

Mr. Carmichael, who was still limping along on his crutch-like translations, looked up slowly. It was the first time in her life that Honor had ever roused him from his reading. "Yes, my dear," he said, in answer to her question, and his voice shook as he spoke. He had not heard the foregoing conversation.

"It is here now—diphtheria, I mean," cried Honor, scarcely knowing what she said, or what she meant. "Rosaline's niece, who is in the kitchen at this moment, has just come from a house in which her little brother lies dead of it."

"Well, my dear, you had the illness too, when—when your brother had it. I do not think you will take it again," said Mr. Carmichael slowly.

"No—no—not I, papa—but Gladys," cried Honor, in despair.

The father started. Of his two girls, Gladys most resembled his dead boy; of the two perhaps he loved the little one best.

"Send the woman here," he said, sternly. "By God's help, that scourge shall not come near us again."

Honor caught up Gladys, and bore her away to the *salon*, and shut her up there, to the child's grand disappointment, who wanted to see and hear the end of her best and most successful conversational experiment. Then Honor rushed away to the kitchen.

She found Rosaline sitting on the floor, her cap off, which is always a sign of grief among people who are ordinarily capped. On her lap there lay a little pink pinafore, and beside her knelt Lili, weeping abundantly.

"*Eh, le p'tit marmot—eh ce fléau terrible* which has come amongst us," moaned the warm-hearted Frenchwoman,

rocking herself to and fro. "Half the mothers in Pierreport are weeping for their dead children. There is *mère* Duval's daughter mad with grief at the loss of her little one, and now, my own sister, bereaved of her Violet. Ah! if Mademoiselle had but known him, *un enfant si doux, si gentil.* Why the last time I saw him—only the last time, he clambered upon my back, and asked me to give him a pink pinafore like that of Mademoiselle Gladice—*eh le pauvre petit.*" And here the devoted aunt was quite overcome, and compelled to wipe her eyes on the said little garment.

Here Honor who had listened sympathetically enough at first, broke out indignantly.

"Gladys, Gladys! Mademoiselle Gladys!" she cried. "You have dared to mention her name, and yet you have brought infection into the very air she breathes." And then she lost all control over her-

self, and poured forth the vials of her wrath, and commanded Rosaline to appear at once in her father's presence.

The Frenchwoman stood up in sheer astonishment. "*Mademoiselle me fait des injures*," she said, flinging the pink pinafore across her shoulder like an *oriflamme*. "If Mademoiselle Gladice could only take infection from that blessed angel now in heaven, then Mademoiselle Gladice were safe indeed. The child has been buried a week, and Lili had not seen him for more than a month before his death. She brought me the news, it is true, but they came to her by means of a letter written to our aged mother, with whom *la fillette* has been living for some weeks past. *Tenez, voici la lettre*, Mademoiselle can judge for herself whether I speak the truth or not."

Honor felt ashamed of her angry words.

"No, no," she said, pushing the letter

away. "You must forgive me, Rosaline; I was frightened—I did not understand. My only brother died of diphtheria, and I feared for Gladys——"

"*Soyez tranquille, mademoiselle,*" interposed Rosaline, sympathetically. "*Le bon Dieu* can never want to take away from us all the beautiful things in the world; and has He not gathered to Himself *mon Violet?*"

To do Rosaline justice, she was almost as much devoted to Gladys as she had been to poor little Violet. She would cheat her master, and tell any number of lies with or without reason, but she was true to her nature in her passion for children. There is always something strangely winning and attractive to French folks in those small specimens of the coming race. Nothing is too good for them; nothing is ridiculous that is done for the sake of *un bébé*. The *pétroleuse*, blind to all judgment and dead to all faith, was yet

not dead to the cries of a little child lying alone and forsaken on the blood-stained stones of Paris. Prince Raoul will leave his wine untouched and his cigar unlighted, to stump round the room at the bidding of little three-year old *Roi Gros-Jean*, or will forsake the side of the fair young girl he means to make his beautiful second wife, to mince up the dinner of pretty, *bouclée*, motherless Marie. In all classes, from all natures, the same love, the same devotion. Of his own nation, verily, and of his own nation only, are Victor Hugo's lines true—

"Lorsque l'enfant paraît, le cercle de famille,
Applaudit à grand cris : son doux regard qui brille
Fait briller tous les yeux."

"Papa," said Honor, returning to the *salon*, and finding her father still sitting at the table with his head bowed over his book. "I was wrong. I was mistaken. The little girl whom I thought had just

come out of an infected house, has not been near it for weeks."

"Ah!" said the father in a tone of satisfaction. Strange, dreamy, absorbed man as he was, he felt as if a load was slipping off his heart. "That is well. You do exaggerate a little sometimes, Honor, I think."

Exaggerate! of course she did. For what is anxiety but exaggerated love? and what is love—maternal love, at any rate, —but one long course of exaggerated anxiety? Only there are some folks who never know either the one or the other.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT MADAME MÈRE'S.

"'True,' say the children, 'it may happen
That we die before our time.
Little Alice died last year—the grave is shapen
Like a snowball in the rime.'"

E. B. BROWNING.

HALF-AN-HOUR later, Gladys having been released from durance vile in the *salon*, and Honor having thrown off her anxieties and resumed her comatose condition, the sisters passed through the *porte cochère*, and sallied forth for a walk. It was one of those bleak black mornings that always betoken snow. The sky was heavy and

leaden looking, the pavement was dry and hard, while as for the wind, it cut one to the quick, like a foe in one's household, who always chooses the weakest moments and the most defenceless spots upon which to make his attack.

"How cold it is," said Gladys shivering. "Is this the winter, Honor?"

"Yes, dear," replied Honor, thinking the fact sufficiently patent, without further explanation.

"But you said we should go home in the winter. Why don't we go?"

"We *shall* go soon; when Christmas is past and the New Year has come, we shall be back in London. Are you so anxious to go home, Queenie?"

"Of course I am; I am tired of Pierreport, and so are you, Honor, I know."

Was she? Honor did not know herself. Pierreport was a bitter place, cruel and cold, and full of broken dreams and drowned hopes; but home—home to the

willow-tree where the tea-table stood; home to creeper-twined verandah, beneath which that kiss had been given and taken; home, whither Stephen would never more come, never more be waited and watched for—was not this worse, far worse? Honor could not tell. Pierreport, stamped with cruel associations; home hung round with pictures of vanished hopes, and peopled with shadows of unforgotten things. She knew not which was bitterest—no, not she.

"What is Gaspard doing now?" asked Gladys, suddenly. "Do you think that he is talking to that dead brother of mine, of whom you spoke to papa just now?"

Honor started. She had been thinking of love whilst the little one had been dreaming of death. And yet there was nothing incongruous in it. Have not the two been wedded since the beginning of the world? For had love—earthly love—love of woman never been,

then death—human death—had never been either.

Gladys repeated the question. Honor was puzzled for an answer.

"I do not know, dear," she said, at length. "That is just one of the things God has not given us to know."

"I don't want to *know*," returned the child, impatiently. "I only asked you what you *thought*, Honor."

Honor looked down at the bright face upturned to hers. "It is very difficult," she said, "more difficult, perhaps, to explain than to understand. But my thought is something like this. When you are tucked up in your little bed at night, Gladys, and I go away into the next room, you cannot see me, you know, but you believe I am there, and you can guess what I am doing. And so with our dear dead friends; we do not know exactly whither they are gone, because our eyes cannot follow them, but we hope and

believe they are in heaven. And as you do not cry after me when I leave you alone in the dark, so neither should we mourn hopelessly for those 'that die in the Lord.' Do you understand so far, Queenie?"

"Yes—yes," replied the child, quickly. "Only, of course, I do not cry after you when you go into the next room, Honor, because I know what you are doing; you are mending your gloves, or putting the chairs tidy after I have been romping. And I can tell exactly how you do it, because I know how everything stands in the room. But I do not know what the place is like where Gaspard is, so how can I guess what he is doing?"

"Supposing, then, that papa was in Paris, or in some other beautiful place you have never seen; and supposing he sent for me one day, and I went to him, and left you, when I was gone, you would not forget me altogether, would

you, darling? No, you would think of me sometimes, and would try to imagine what I was doing, and try to guess what that beautiful place might be like——"

"Oh, I should not try to guess, I should *know*," interrupted the child, with a great light shining in her eyes. "If Paris is such a beautiful place, it must be just like St. Mark's Road when the lamps are lighted, only there should be no poor people there, and the gardens should always have flowers in them, and the sky should never be foggy, but full of light, like the sea. And I should know what you would be doing too, Honor. You would be walking with papa, and he would have given you a new dress to wear, and some beautiful shining jewels too, perhaps, and then sometimes you would think of me, and blow me a kiss with the wind. Am I right, Honor? am I right?" said the child, pushing up her

small bright face, and shaking Honor's hand in her eagerness for an answer.

But Honor could not answer just then. Her whole being seemed to be thrilled by the child's words. She did not like to hear her little sister talk like this, and yet she was strangely moved by it. It was unnatural, she thought. Not that it was in reality, but it seemed so to Honor. Intelligent town-bred children often think and talk after this fashion. I don't know that country children do. But then, there is always less poetry, because there is always less suffering in the country than in the town.

Poetry of a certain kind, I mean, of course, dear people who are starting up indignantly at this statement. You see it all depends upon one's views of the matter. If, by poetry, you mean a smooth, soothing sedative, full of buzzing bees and swelling seas, and verdant vales

and slugs and snails, then put yourself into the train, and steam away from the town, and its fog, and its smoke, and its life, and its labour. You will not find what you want here.

But if, by poetry, you mean "people—helping words," sounds like clarion-notes, calling men to battle for right and trample wrong under foot; if by poetry you mean music that thrills the coldest, and kindles the dullest, and opens the closest heart, then seek for it in the town; in some spreading, overflowing, over-crowded town, which, with all its toil and turmoil, is yet a type of that Great New City wherein shall be room and rest for all. Just as earth, grave-strewn, is a symbol of Heaven, the Home of the risen ones; or as our death here is a sign of our life there.

Meanwhile, the innocent suggestor of this digression was eagerly awaiting her answer.

"Am I right?" she said. "Can't you tell me, Honor? Must I wait till I get there to know? How long shall I have to wait, I wonder?"

"My darling—my darling—do not say such things!" cried Honor, huskily. And then she caught the little one's hand in hers, and began walking very fast. "It is going to snow," she said. "We must make haste home." And as she spoke a few flakes fell.

"It is beginning already," cried Gladys, capering about. "I like the snow; it always looks like something good to eat." And the little *gourmande* opened her mouth wide.

The storm came on in earnest. The sisters were as warm as wool, but as white as snow-queens, before they reached the Rue Bon Secours.

"Go in, dear," said Honor, shaking the snow off the little red cloak. "Go in and sit by the fire till I come back. I

shall not be long. I am only going as far as Madame Mère's fruit-shop to get some oranges for papa."

"Oh, let me come too," pleaded Gladys. But Honor was inexorable.

"It is too cold for little feet," she said, decisively.

She looked back once as she turned away, and she never forgot the picture she saw then. There was the little figure still standing in the grim doorway, with the snow falling over her. Her cheeks were as bright as the cloak she wore, her eyes were dancing with health, with happiness, her hands were outstretched, her pretty parted lips were still pleading to follow her sister.

"No, no," shouted Honor, through the snow. "Go in, go in." Then the door was shut, the vision vanished, but the remembrance of it remained engraved for ever upon Honor's memory. She can see the picture still whenever she chooses.

Meanwhile, she went on through the snow, gathering her cloak about her closely. It was not her own old cloak, that had never been returned to her by Valentine. This one was a commoner thing, and had evidently been made for a much taller person even than our Honor; but it was thick, and warm, and answered its purpose well enough.

She had some distance to go, but she did not mind that. Indeed, she rather enjoyed battling with the weather. On she dashed, with her long cloak flapping behind her, down the street, round the corner, across the road, up the steps leading to the fruit-shop, on the threshold of which she stopped short suddenly, and found herself face to face with Stephen Aylmer!

One end of her cloak had been caught by a saucepan, that was set like a trap on the topmost step, the other had wrapped itself round the young man, as

Honor, unconscious alike of perils behind and dangers before, had hurled herself forward almost into his arms. There they stood together, entangled in the same cloak, touching each other, trembling a little, but silent both of them. Honor was the first to speak.

"How is Valentine?" she said, stooping down suddenly, and unhooking her cloak, and setting Stephen free once more.

"Dying!" replied Stephen, excitedly; "dying of this horrible throat disease—diphtheria—scarlet fever, whatever it may be—of which all Pierreport seems to be either dead or dying. I was just starting for London when she fell ill; but, of course, I could not leave her in such a state, and I cannot get a soul to attend to her. Old Madelon is worn out, and all the *sœurs de charité* are engaged. Even the ladies of Notre Dame de Bon Secours are employed in the hospitals, all

except Sœur Geneviève, who is ill herself, not of this fever, but of brain fever. As for that old wretch Pulliot, she left us a week ago. She said she had to look after her house in the town, but I believe she was afraid of infection, and I, of course, can do nothing. Indeed, Valentine screams whenever I look in at the door. It is very painful, but not unusual, the doctor says. Will you let me pass now, please," he added, brushing past the girl with a basket of hot-house fruit in his hands. "I am going to take her these grapes."

All this time Honor had not spoken a word. She had stood in the narrow doorway, staring at him blindly. When he passed her, however, she ran out after him, down the slippery steps, into the snowy streets.

"Stephen—Stephen," she cried, wildly, catching him up, and laying her hand upon his arm. "Have you just been with

Valentine? Have you come straight from her, here, without changing your clothes?"

"Of course I have. Don't keep me now, please. I want to get back to her."

Honor's face fell. Her hands dropped down by her side.

"And you have touched me," she gasped, with an "exceeding bitter cry." "You have touched me, Stephen!"

"Why, Honor, what do you mean?" asked Stephen, angrily. "Are you so absurdly afraid of infection? I wonder you ever go into a shop if you are, for—"

"I am not afraid for myself," interrupted Honor, gravely, and speaking quite calmly now. "I am only afraid for Gladys. Our hands have touched, our clothes have rubbed together, and you have come straight from a fever bed, Stephen. Less things than that have carried infection. I will not run the

risk—I dare not return to the child. But" (and here her voice began to shake again, though she went on bravely "but, Stephen—if you like—and if my father will let me—I will come, and nurse Valentine for—for you—"

"Oh, Honor—you are an angel!" cried Stephen, warmly, trying to catch and clasp her hand in his. "And you need not be afraid of taking the fever yourself, for it has been chiefly confined to children hitherto. But I do not think your father will let you come."

"I am not in the least afraid," Honor repeated, keeping her hands down by her side. "And I think my father will let me go. If so, I will be with you in an hour's time."

"And you will save her—if you come," cried the young fellow, passionately. "You will save her once more—for me, Honor!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

HONOR'S EYES ARE OPENED.

"A fire of hope that but waxed and waned,
Words that soothed, and words that pained,
And hot strange light in the aching eyes."

PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

VALENTINE was very ill. She had been lying in a sort of stupor for some hours before Honor arrived, but the opening of the door, and the swish of the girl's dress, soft and low as both were, seemed to rouse her.

"Go away," she cried, starting up

suddenly, fixing her bright, burning, senseless eyes upon Honor's face. "Go away, Stephen—put down the cards—they are poisoned, you know—they will kill you as they killed my father. Ah no—he is not dead yet—he is playing still. Oh, Stephen—do not die as he died—do not live as he lived! Who was Edmée? What, you think you are winning now? Yes, they all think that, and they all lose in the end. You are mistaken, Stephen. You think you have wooed and won an angel—and you have only got—me—me—" (a hysterical laugh which made Honor shudder). "I love you? Yes, yes! I think I do. Another must have loved you, too—might have loved you better than I do. Not more—oh no, that is impossible—but better, you know. And you would have loved another—nay, may have done so already for all I know. Are those your arms round me? Hold me tighter,

Stephen—closer to your heart—so—so. What is this between us? Is it a letter? Is it a book? Oh, father, father—who was Edmée?"

Valentine was delirious. She had been so almost all day long.

For a moment, for one second only, Honor shrank back terrified. The next she had slipped into Mademoiselle Madelon's place, and was holding the girl down in her bed, quietly, but firmly.

"Go and rest," she whispered to the tired *dame de compagnie*. "Go and sleep—I have come to help you."

The poor woman looked up, scared. She was in a curious state "betwixt waking and sleeping," not having had any rest for several nights and days.

"She is very bad," responded Mademoiselle Madelon, shaking her head. Then she trotted off obediently, leaving Honor to fill her place by the bedside,

and stretched herself out on a couple of chairs, and dreamt of—the angels.

It was no easy task which Honor had imposed upon herself, and it tested her whole strength, for the fever ran high, and Valentine tossed about and raved incessantly. Always of the same thing; always addressing Stephen, and mixing up his life with that of her father. Always warning him of the cards, the dice, the gambler's life, and the suicide's death.

Little by little, Honor began to understand. Slowly, very slowly, her eyes were opened, and she saw what manner of girl this was whom she had chosen to be her friend—whom Stephen was about to make his wife. It was as if a fog had cleared away, and she saw, down below, the awful abyss over which she had been hovering—nay, worse still, she could see Stephen standing there too, and she was powerless to stretch forth her hand and

pull him back. It was like a horrible nightmare.

"Oh Stephen—Stephen!" she cried, as Valentine cried, almost as hopelessly, if not quite so wildly—"Come back, dear, come back. Leave all these dreadful things alone." But he could not hear, she knew.

Just when the short, grey winter's day deepened into darkness, and the yellow lights in the town below began to shine out one by one, the doctor came in. He had been there twice before that day, and had not been idle in the meantime. For, over and above the epidemic, the autumn was always a sickly season at Pierreport, and Dr. Lévy had his hands full.

He was a bright, brisk little man, full of kindliness and hope, and always ready to laugh at himself and his profession in a way that was most inspiriting. The present case, however, was no laughing

matter, and there was little room for hope in connection with it.

"There is nothing to be done except incessant watching," he said, bending over his patient. Then turning abruptly to Honor, and addressing her, he asked—"Will you undertake to do this, Mademoiselle?"

Mademoiselle Madelon looked slightly hurt. She had started up alertly on the Doctor's arrival, and would, I am sure, have indignantly denied ever having been asleep. Honor bowed her head in silence.

"It is her only chance," uttered the doctor, turning away, without bestowing any further attention upon the rival nurses.

Stephen was lying in wait on the stairs, to catch him. They were old friends by this time, for it was Dr. Lévy, you remember, who had brought home Colonel Murray's bleeding body from the sands,

and followed him to the grave. It was also Dr. Lévy who had been the first, if not almost the only person in Pierreport (except, perhaps, Honor), to congratulate Stephen and Valentine on their prospects. He had shared their trouble: should he not also share their joy? He was not one of those who always find it easier to condole with their friends than to rejoice for them. The world is full of people who will sigh over us, pray for us; but the feet that will dance to our music, the lips that will laugh at our jests, are few and far between. Dr. Lévy possessed them. He was everybody's confessor, everybody's godfather. It is a part kind-hearted doctors frequently play, especially among Protestant communities.

"How do you find her?" asked Stephen breathlessly.

"Just the same, *mon ami*," said the doctor kindly, laying his hand on the young fellow's shoulder, and looking into

his handsome, haggard face. "I dare not say otherwise. But courage, she has a better chance now than she had before. She has someone to nurse her at last, and a good someone too, unless my skill in physiognomy misleads me. Who is this girl, M. Aylmere?"

"She is the daughter of the English chaplain here," replied Stephen.

"Now our Lady forbid!" cried the worthy little doctor, crossing himself. "I thought she was a good Catholic. She reminds me somehow of that sainted Sœur Geneviève, who, I fear, is about to betake herself to another world. She has the same sort of look in her eyes—a sort of haunting look, as though something had dropped out of her life which she never hopes to find again. Do you not observe it, Monsieur?" And then the little man dropped the subject of Honor out of his mind, and hurried away to the bedside of his next patient.

For two days and two nights Honor, with her haunting eyes, watched beside Valentine. On the third night a change came, the crisis was past. Valentine's tongue was still at last. She slept.

"If she sleep, she shall do well," the doctor had said, in the old expressive Scripture phrase. But somehow it seemed he had hardly expected she would sleep.

She did though—through the long dreary hours of the night; till the lights in the town were put out, and the stars disappeared of their own accord, Valentine slept on and Honor still watched.

When the cold night, however, shivered into a colder dawn, the girl-nurse rose, threw a shawl over her head, and slipt noiselessly out of the room. In the *salon* beyond Mademoiselle Madelon was sitting bolt upright in an uncomfortable high-backed chair. She was supposed to be awake and ready for any summons, but, in reality, the poor old thing was nodding

away to herself, and smiling, and gurgling as she dreamt, no doubt, of the pleasant days of long ago. It is seldom that sleep can be conquered save by sickness, or by love, which the poets tell us is indeed a sickness of the soul.

Honor placed a cushion behind her nodding head, and went on her way.

There was someone below who was not asleep, someone whose step had sounded all night long in the lane outside, restless and fitful as the beating of her own heart.

"Stephen—Stephen!" she cried, running out towards him.

"Oh, Honor—you need not tell me! I can read your news in your face. Oh, Honor—how can I ever thank you enough?"

On a summer's day, the same young man had stood at that garden-gate, and the same young girl had come running

out to meet him, with almost the same words on her lips. The same—were they the same? Is the grey leaf the same as the green leaf? Is the Kyrie the same as the Gloria? Are we ourselves ever the same one day with another?

Yes, truly, though we can scarcely believe it sometimes—we *are* the same instrument still, only differently played upon. The great Composer has pulled another stop—that is all—until—until we drop altogether out of the orchestra of life.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE STEPS.

"We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind,
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be,
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering,
In the faith that looks through death."

WORDSWORTH.

AS soon as Valentine was pronounced out of danger, Mr. Aylmer left Pierreport for London. He had business to settle there, he said, and several people he wished to see before going to India. Was there someone in Pierreport he would rather

not meet, day after day, now that the excitement of illness was over? Honor liked to fancy this was so. She liked to believe he had his own kind heart still, and would fain spare her this additional pain.

Valentine recovered very slowly. She had been at death's door, to use the common phrase, and it takes a long time to travel back to life after having been so nearly "across the border." Nor did she expedite her journey by patience. She grew very tired of it—tired of swallowing soups and sops—impatient of Honor's gentle ways, and gentler voice.

Honor could not help it. She yearned to go home, (how intensely no one but herself could tell), but she was forced to remain where she was, till all chance of infection should be over. "A week more," Dr. Lévy had said yesterday. One—two—three—four—five—six days. Honor counted them up, and jotted them off, as eagerly as any schoolboy.

"Why don't you go out for a walk?" said Valentine one day, pushing up her chin in her old quick way. "I am so tired of seeing you always prowling about in that blue serge dress of yours."

Valentine was lying on the sofa by the window. She was wrapped in a white shawl, and the pale wintry sunlight came flickering in and shaking over her. Sickness had robbed her of none of her charms; rather had it added to them. It had thrown over her ordinarily quick movements a strange subtle languor, and given her face a sort of ethereal diaphanous beauty, such as one sees in the pictures of virgin saints, painted by modern French artists. Only, if she were a saint, it is as well for the world in general, I think, that sinners should predominate in it.

Honor, the sinner (and she thought herself a far bigger one than she was), had never betrayed herself in the eyes of

Valentine the saint. She used to wonder afterwards how it was she had not done so. "I did not know I had so much self-control," she would say to some one with whom she had much conversation in later days. And that someone would answer, with a sigh—"Perhaps it was not you who had so much self-control, but the other who had so feeble a sight. I think there are always more blind people than dumb ones in the world. Indeed, I rather think we are all blind, until God, in His mercy, sends us sorrow to wash the dust out of our eyes, and enable us to see more clearly, and know more nearly, and love more dearly." And then that someone held her hands. And then——

But this was long after, and has no business to be written here—at this juncture—on this day least of all. For, on this very day, Honor nearly lost her vaunted self-control. She looked at

Valentine as she lay there in her strange, pale beauty, like a marble statue, or a white flower, and she felt a sudden rush of feelings come over her—pity, anger, indignation. Then, fearful lest they should overwhelm her altogether, she fled out of the room, into the garden, into the lane ; where she had never been, except for one moment that morning when she had brought out the news to Stephen Aylmer, since the snowy day when she had come toiling up the hill to undertake the duties of sick nurse.

It struck her strangely at first—the strong, salt air, and the glorious sunshine. But it did her good, too. It blew away the cobwebs, and swept her mind clear, she thought.

She went along the lane, and down the steps that lead to the town. On the second flight she paused awhile, then sat down. The warm dry stones were sparkling in the sunshine, the little red-

roofed town lay among the shadows ; it all looked just as it had looked many a summer's day ; for however it may be with you, Nature, your mother, seldom changes her countenance. Your heart may be riven with anguish, but there stand the everlasting hills, knit together now, as they were when you and your beloved first looked at them together.

The love of your life may be drowned in the sea of desolation, and yet the spring tides ebb and flow, and the sun rises daily to laugh in the smiling face of the blue waters. Is Nature, then, so unsympathetic, cruel, mocking? Nay, not so. She simply bides her time, and gives, as it were, her children their fling, in turn.

"Go," she says, "if such be your pleasure. Fly after your phantoms : spend your days in merry-go-rounds, never catching so much as the tail of the Pegasus that gallops before you, and when you are tired of your sports, come

back to me, and I will show you the same smiling face. I am keeping the sun and the sea, the moon and the mountain, safe for you, and when all else fail, these shall give you comfort. You will understand some day."

Honor did not understand as yet; nevertheless, in the presence of this smiling, faithful, true-hearted Nature, she felt brighter and better than she had done for many a day past. It seemed to her that she could never be so unhappy again as she had been. She had borne the worst of woman's sorrows (or, at least, what seemed the worst to her girlhood), and, by God's help, she had not, perhaps, borne them so badly after all. She had suffered, and been strong. She had faced her false lover, and not died in his presence. She had not shrunk from acknowledging the truth, and truth, however sad and bitter, is always more endurable than "the imagination of man's

heart, which is evil continually." The burden one has to bear is better than the burden one dreamt of bearing. It is the snow that hangs about the sky that makes the air so keen and cold, not the snow which has fallen and made white the face of the earth. It is the blast that goes before the storm that blinds our eyes; it is the steam that rises off the cup that makes us turn away from a draught, bitter no doubt, but less nauseous, less acrid, than the mixture of false ideas and vain hopes we brew for ourselves. Honor had drunk of this cup—not all of it yet—nor half of it, perhaps, poor soul, but enough to make her say, as she sat there in the sunshine, "Surely, oh surely, the bitterness of death is past!"

She leant back on the stones, and took off her hat, and clasped her hands behind her head. No one was likely to come up that way, for the road at the bottom of

the steps had been almost impassable with mud since the late rains. Stephen, it is true, went up and down them sometimes, it being a short cut from his lodgings to Mont St. Michel, but he was away, and no one else was likely to attempt the feat. Honor might lay her head on a stone for a pillow, and dream Jacob's dream, if she chose, without fear of anyone disturbing her slumbers.

She sat there a long time. How long she did not know. Perhaps she did dream—of the angels—a little.

By-and-by, across her dream there fell the shadow of a child, and mingled with the angels' songs came the sound of a tinkling step, and the ring of a merry voice rippling over with laughter. Honor started to her feet, and stood still for a second, rubbing her eyes, and looking round her, uncertainly. Then suddenly she flew like an arrow to its mark.

But the child was too quick for her.

"Honor, Honor, I have caught you at last. I am so glad — so glad!" cried Gladys, springing after her, and holding her fast, and burying her bright rosy face in the folds of the objected-to blue serge dress.

Honor, in an agony, pushed her away.

"Don't, darling," she cried, trying in vain to loose the clinging clasp of the little hands. "Run back to papa. See—there he is," she added, as her father, with his eyes on his book, and his feet heavily freighted with mud, slowly "hove" in sight at the bottom of the steps.

"No, no, Honor, I have found you, and I mean to keep you now," cried the child, eagerly. "Do come home with us. It is rather dull being all alone with papa."

Who could resist those pleading lips? Who could refrain from kissing that sweet, bright, up-turned face? Only infinite

love, or intense fear, which must always be part of such a love as Honor's.

"Have you forgotten to be obedient?" she said, sternly. "Go back to papa at once, Gladys."

The child looked up for a moment with a scared, startled face. Honor had never spoken to her so roughly before. Then the tears gathered slowly in the big brown eyes, the golden head drooped a little, the clinging hands let go their hold, and the child crept away down the steps to her father.

As for Honor, she went up them again, quivering in every limb.

"It was here she held me, it was there she hid her face," she cried, shaking the hateful blue gown. "And Valentine had touched it but an hour ago." For the moment she was mad.

When she reached the topmost step, however, she knelt down, and prayed. She knew not how long she remained

there, but when she rose up again it seemed to her as if her prayers had been heard.

"Ah, God is merciful," she said, clasping her hands together. "He will not suffer so small a thing to work so great a sorrow—"

And yet—and yet—a flash of the sword and the warrior is dead—a word spoken in haste, and a soul may be lost for eternity!



CHAPTER XX.

SHADOWS.

"We must have a number of shadows to fill up the muster-book."—FALSTAFF.

THE day came at last when Valentine might leave her sofa, and go out into the fresh air and clear sunshine. It was a great event. Mademoiselle Madelon wrapped her up. Stephen, who had returned the night before, went with her. They strolled up and down the lane, discussing, no doubt, their future prospects.

Honor did not accompany them. They

did not want her, of course, and she had promised herself not to go out again till the time came for going home.

She leant from the window, however, and looked out after the lovers. She tried to think she had forgiven them, but she knew very well she had not done so. The sight of Stephen had renewed within her all her old stony feelings. Her heart was as hard against them as the ground had been yesterday during the frost. That was soft now. Some snow had fallen in the night, and now the sun was shining and the ground was all wet and springy. Was there no more sunshine for her—nor any snow either? Would her heart never grow soft again? Never heave and swell with gentle dews, and blossom once more with kindliness and generosity? Honor, poor Honor, did not know.

It was a bright breezy day, notwithstanding yesterday's frost and snow. The

sea was studded with fishing-boats, as a sky is strewn with stars. Yet only last week a boat had struck upon yonder rock; and an old man had been drowned, with his two sons, and his boy-grandson, as well. The people had mourned with the women for a day, the sea had looked angry for an hour, and then all had been again as though these things were not. Would it be so with her? Her good ship had gone down, and the sea had closed over it, but the waves were not dancing for her; it was a dreary waste of waters that lay stretched out before her. Honor did not dread pain so much as she dreaded monotony. Day after day, wave after wave, as far as she could see it was all dull, grey, colourless. She had hardly emerged from under a rock which had well nigh crushed her, and here she was already afraid of a future in which there should be no shadows. And she was right. Shadows are

good things in themselves, inasmuch as they prove the presence of better things. There must be a sun, or, at least, a moon —there must be some actual body or being close beside us when the shadows cross our path. A life without shadows, if such a thing were possible, would be like soup without salt, or day without night. One might as well be a dormouse wrapped up in cotton wool at once.

Such a life, however, was not in store for Honor—at least, not yet. Her good ship had gone down, it is true, but was there not still a gay little pleasure-boat to sail along in its track—a brave little boat with sails set and bunting flying, and such a big cargo of love! Was there not always Gladys?

Yes, always Gladys. She would never leave the child now. Perhaps she had not yet been sufficiently thankful for that blessing. There would be no parting for them now; no miles of sea and land

stretching between her and her little one. The cup had been bitter to drink, but there was this lump of sugar at the bottom. There would always be Gladys.

She turned away from the window and thought of the child. Nine years old in January, for Gladys had been born with the new year and the snowdrops. She must begin to learn something now. Honor must see about it as soon as they got home again. Should she send her to Miss Pincock's little school, or should she have a governess for her at home? Honor shrank from both ideas. No, she would teach her herself all she knew, and then——

Nine years old in January. Ten more years, and she, too, perhaps, would be drifting away from her side. Honor would not think of that, she would think rather of the little frocks. Gladys must have some new ones. All those of last winter were too small for her now. They

had tried them on one day, and laughed at the result. Gladys' arms and legs had stuck out of them like Master Carraway's limbs out of his scanty garments, so the child had said; and they had settled to give the little frocks away to Rosaline, for her little nephews and nieces, for poor little Violet, who was dead. The child had grown so much since she came to Pierreport, perhaps she would even have grown a little since Honor had seen her last. And then she leaned back in her chair, and closed her eyes, and pictured to herself the meeting which would soon take place between them.

Two more days, and she would clasp her in her arms. When the day before Christmas day came, Dr. Lévy had said there could no longer be any possibility of her conveying infection to any one.

How they would laugh when they saw each other again! How they would chatter and clatter, and catch each other's

faces between their hands, and kiss a dozen times for each day they had missed. If only the hours would go a little faster, and that one glad moment arrive. If only always one could rush past the grey milestones and dash on to the golden gate.

Nay, nay, dears, be content. The road is dusty, I know, and the milestones are ugly, no doubt, and the gate shining over there is full of light, and beautiful as a painted church window. But if you knew that it was only a common gate after all, a gate such as anyone can make, and most people do make; if you could see that the shifting shadows and mobile lights were but thrown there by yourself as you hurried along the road, would you still go on rushing past the milestones at such electric speed? would you still go on longing for your express trains and short cut? would you heed my warning and let it spare you much?

Would you? I cannot tell. All I know

is that Honor certainly did not; and as things thus passionately longed for are often strangely accomplished in some way or other (as if there were always someone lying in wait to catch our prayers, and grant us our desires, or else a parody of them), so this poor girl suddenly found her weary time of waiting shortened by two days.

She was still sitting there musing with closed eyes, when the door opened with a jerk, and Mademoiselle Madelon, who had not forgiven the doctor's partiality for Honor's nursing powers in preference to her own, threw a letter down upon the table before her.

"*Voilà pour vous, mademoiselle,*" she said, retreating once more.

Honor glanced at the letter mechanically. Then suddenly she snatched it up. She did not open it, she did not read it, but she knew—ah! she had known for a week past what its contents must be.

She seized her hat, and flew out of the house into the lane, down the steps, towards the Rue Bon Secours. Once she paused for breath, and looked up to the bleak, blue sky, and tried to pray, once she opened the letter, and tried to read it. But there was a mist before her eyes, a chill salt taste on her lips. She could not see to read, she could not lift her heart to pray. She let the letter drop from her hands, and never pausing to pick it up, sped on homewards like a bird to its nest.

And Stephen going back to his lodgings at night, whistling as he went, with Valentine's laugh still ringing in his ears, found the poor little letter fluttering about in the mud at the bottom of the steps. He picked it up. It was open, and he could not help reading it by the light of the moon, for it only contained three short lines.

"Gladys is a little unwell. Dr. Lévy has just seen her. He thinks it may prove to be a slight case of diphtheria. He says you had better come home."

"Poor Honor!" said Stephen, letting the letter flutter back once more into the mud. "May heaven save her from this trial!"

And he had tried once to set his love for her against hers for the child!

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW HONOR REACHED THE GOLDEN GATE.

" Flecte quod est rigidum :
Fove quod est frigidum
Rege quod est devium
Da virtutis meritum :
Da salutis exitum
Da parenne gaudium."

KING ROBERT OF FRANCE. (*Circa* 1027.)

THE outer door of the Chaplain's apartment was standing open, when Honor rushed up the stairs in a whirlwind of terror and anxiety. Rosaline had happened to see her coming down the street, and had set the door open for her. She dared not

face her young mistress with the fears she knew were written in her tearful eyes. But she sympathized thoroughly with her. She had known herself so lately what it was to lose a little child she loved.

The *salon* door was open too. Honor looked in eagerly, anxiously. She hardly knew what she dreaded, or what she thought; but she certainly did not expect to see Gladys sitting there by the fire, with her little feet tucked up on the fender, and her little hands restlessly playing with some white wool knitting, threaded upon ivory pins.

She stood still for a moment, gasping for breath, and endeavouring to regain her spent strength. The child was not ill after all; she could not be ill with those eyes that shone like stars, and those cheeks that burnt like flames, and those red curling lips that were rosier than rose-leaves. Poor Honor thought her darling had never looked more beauti-

ful than now, as she sat there before the low wood fire, with her bright tangled hair pushed back off her forehead, and falling over her shoulders, like a wind-blown, sun-born, golden mist.

The father thought so too, perhaps—thought for once that his little daughter was more worth looking at than the big, black-lettered book across his knee. These pages remained unturned, unread, the weary old eyes sought perpetually the small, spiritual face of his child, who glanced up and smiled at him, faintly, now and again.

Surely she was not ill. Honor had made a mistake. The letter might not have been about Gladys after all. How foolish it was of her not to have read it. She had let it drop at the foot of the steps, she remembered. Should she go back and find it? Perhaps, indeed, she ought to go away altogether. It was two

days earlier than the doctor had said she might return home.

But the child's quick ears had caught the sound of a sigh.

"Honor!" she cried, a little hoarsely; but starting up in her chair, and clapping her hands. "Honor come back at last! Oh, I am so glad—so glad! And you will not push me away *this* time, will you, Honor?"

For all answer the girl rushed upon her, and caught her to her heart.

"There is not much the matter with her, I think," said the father slowly, after a pause, as Honor drew back on her knees, the better to look at her little sister. "I thought it as well to write; but there really is not much the matter."

"Not much the matter," echoed the child, trying to laugh. "Not much the matter, except that papa keeps looking at me so often, and my head

aches, and my throat burns, and my hands are so hot—so hot."

"But we will soon put all that to rights, won't we, Honor?" continued the father, whose old, dreamy face seemed suddenly to have grown quite keen and hard, like a pane of glass on a winter's day, when the frost-flowers are wiped off it. "She was always a delicate child, you know. But she will be all right again in a day or two, won't she, Honor?"

"Oh yes—papa dear—in a day or two," answered someone. But that someone was not Honor.

"Why, she looks better already, since you have come; don't you think so, Honor?" said the father, in that sad sort of half-persuasive, half-questioning tone, which we all use, when we want to convince another of a fact we dare not believe in ourselves. "Yes, she is certainly better. You can speak more easily now, can't you, dear? Yes, I am

sure you can. Come, tell Honor all you have done since she has been away. Tell her of all our walks, and talks, and about the little boy and girl in the fishing quarter, who ran out of one of the houses and gave you some shells. You liked that, didn't you, Gladys ?"

"Yes, papa, I liked it all," said the child, clasping her hot hands round her throat, and speaking as if she had clasped it too tightly. "It was Lili and her little brother, Hyacinthe, who gave me the shells, Honor, you know, and I gave Hyacinthe my spade in return. And I should like Lili to have my doll because—because her little baby brother is dead, and I shall not want it again—I think. Will you take it to her some day for me, please ? And see, I have tried to finish my knitting, but I cannot do any more—my hands are so hot, and the wool keeps on getting entangled. I think it got tangled first whilst I listened to one of

papa's stories. He read it out of a book. It was about a little boy who tried to fly up to the sun; but who only fell into the sea. I cannot remember it very well though, for I seem to be always thinking of the angels now, Honor, and I know *they* fly straight. And that is all I can tell you, except how glad I am that you have come back once more." And the poor, tired child buried her hot face in her sister's breast.

Honor was kneeling on the floor. Her head was thrown back against the sharp end of the chair, her arms were wound round the little one. She was devouring the child with her eyes, but she had not spoken a single word yet.

Suddenly she looked up.

"There is too much wood on the fire," she said, fiercely. "It is too hot here for Gladys."

"That is just what I have been telling her all this time," said the father, help-

lessly, "but she says she likes it. Still, perhaps it would be better if you took her away into a cooler room, and tried to make her eat something, Honor."

"I can't eat, it hurts so," cried the child, clasping her throat with one hand, and passing the other through her sister's arm, as they walked away together once more, in the pretty, old, clinging, caressing fashion. "But come, Honor, let us go away together. You will always come now, when I want you, won't you? You will never leave me again, will you, dear Honor?"

Never? ah! never is a long word, people say, but it meant a very short time that winter's day at Pierreport.

They all knew it—the father and Rosaline, even Madame Pléon, from beyond Mont St. Michel, and the nuns in the convent opposite—all knew that never again would the little child dance up and down the stone-stairs, nor stand at the

window and kiss her hand to the passers-by, nor fill the old grim streets with her bright laughter and gladsome ways, and merry young presence. They all knew it, and in their faces who willed might read their knowledge.

Only Honor, if she knew it, told it not.

She, and she alone, could always laugh when Gladys wanted her to laugh. She, and she alone, could still sing the old songs, and tell the old stories over and over again. She could even count the days that should come and go before they saw the lamps in St. Mark's Road again; and she could do it all, and did do it all, with a calm, sweet face, and a low steady voice. Whatever Gladys wanted, Honor could do, no matter at what cost to herself. Surely this is the triumph of love, when even sorrow can be conquered for the beloved's sake!

The father's face grew piteous. Rosa-

line wept aloud. Even the doctor rubbed his eyes, as he glanced from one sister to the other. But Honor, Honor alone, had no tears to shed.

She would not have shed them had she had any. She must laugh now, all day long if need be. There would be plenty of time to cry when the child should no longer want her to laugh.

She never left her side. She knew exactly what to do, and how to do it. She had learnt the nature of the illness, and the sort of nursing required. The time passed by Valentine's sick-bed had not been, so far, spent in vain.

Not that the child was ever delirious as Valentine had been, nor, alas! did she ever sleep as Valentine had slept.

"She looks a little drowsy to-night, I think," whispers the father, peering wistfully into the small, shrunken, waxen face of his last-born child,

as it lay pitifully upon Honor's shoulder.

The child caught the words, and stroked her sister's face with her little clammy fingers. Honor said nothing.

All day long she had carried Gladys up and down the room, holding her upright in her arms, as Holbein's Virgin holds her child. It was a tiring position, but Honor was not tired. Each moment, it had seemed to her, the little burden grew more sadly, more painfully light.

By-and-by the sisters were left alone together. They had always loved to be together thus; and the slightest sound, the faintest footfall, seemed to rouse and disturb the child.

It was the third night after Honor's return, and a bitter night it was, snowy and soundless, save when the clang of the convent clock vibrated slowly through the still keen air, as it struck off the hours one by one. Honor shivered with

each stroke that fell. But the child in her arms never stirred—never spoke.

Suddenly, through the dark silence, the darkness that had deepened, the silence that had strengthened, as the dawn grew on apace, a peal of bright glad voices rang out jubilantly:

"Adeste fideles,
Lœti triumphantes
Venite, venite in Bethlehem."

"What is that?" asked Gladys, faintly, in a voice that already seemed "a great way off."

"It is the nuns singing, it is Christmas morning, darling," said Honor, who had forgotten the fact herself, but remembered it now with a sudden start. The air was full of heaven's praises and earth's prayers, but she, poor stricken soul, could join in neither of them.

"Let me see," said the child, trying to raise herself in Honor's arms, but failing

to do so, and falling back once more upon the sheltering shoulder.

Honor lifted her up to the window, and drew back the curtain. The snow had ceased falling by this time. The angels were no longer shedding their great feathery tears. They had done their work well, however. Beneath the dusky heavens a new white world lay spread out, a fitting cradle, pure and soft, for the God-child who should be born that day.

"Ergo qui natus,
Die hodierne,
Jesu tibi sit gloria."

The angels went on singing—they were striking their harps, instead of shedding their tears, now. There was a strange light below, a great darkness above. The earth seemed to be sinking away under one's feet, the heavens—were the heavens so near? Honor grew confused.

She sat down in an arm-chair by the fire, but she scarcely knew where she was.

"Good-night, Honor," said Gladys, softly and suddenly.

"But it is morning, Queenie," cried Honor, pointing to the window, and speaking the pretty, old pet name for the last time.

"Good-night," repeated the child calmly. "It is night for you, *I* am going into the next room, you know. And you must not cry very much after me, Honor, for I shall be there—you know—there; where the stars are the lamps—and the people are always happier than happy—— " And then, the little voice which had gone soaring up and up, like a bird through the air, vanished suddenly, and was lost amid the angelic choir.

"Cantet nunc Io!
Chorus angelorum,
Cantet nunc aula cœlestium."

"Gloria
In excelsis Deo!
Venite adoremus,
Venite adoremus,
Venite adoremus Dominum."

It was thus that Honor reached the golden gate.

And here, perhaps, artistically, Honor's story ought to end. But life itself does not end thus. There is always something beyond. We should never die, I verily believe, we could not do it—nature would forbid it—if we were not meant to live again.

When the morning broke, and the pale yellowish light came filtering through the curtainless window and flowing into the dreary room, it fell upon the two sisters lying thus, twined together, the living with the dead. Indeed it was hard at first to tell the living from the dead, for the child was smiling in death, and the girl lay

dumb and numb, and utterly unconscious of life. They tried to rouse her, but she did not heed them. The father came in and out with his piteous and haggard face. "It is wrong to mourn like this," he said once, hesitating. Honor looked at him with stony eyes.

"You never cared for her," she said slowly. "You never thought as much about her, as you thought about one of your books. I must mourn for her doubly."

Sorrow had made her cruel. Those were the only words she spoke all day.

At the end of that sad dull day, kind-hearted Dr. Lévy came in again, and found her still in the same lethargic state.

"This will never do," he said, looking at her anxiously. "She must be roused by some means or other. Has M. le Ministre no friend, no wise kind lady-friend whom he could ask to be with his daughter now?"

Poor M. le Ministre looked utterly bewildered, and the doctor was forced to repeat his remark before he caught the drift of it.

"No friends—no," he said helplessly. "Honor has no friends. She never had any." And then, when pressed a little further, he mentioned the name of Miss Pincock in London.

"It must be someone here—it must be someone to come at once," said the doctor gravely. He was wondering a little at the strange way in which these people mourned their loss. It was the English mode perhaps. "*Tenez*, the *jeune demoiselle* from the Mont St. Michel, the young lady whom Mademoiselle *votre fille* nursed so admirably through her illness, and who is soon about to become a bride, I hear. How would she do, M. le Ministre?" And the doctor rubbed his hands together, and felt not a little proud of his suggestion.

But the old man's face flushed with a sudden strange emotion; then as swiftly grew grey and colourless again.

"She cannot come here," he said in a low stern voice. "I know all now. She is greatly to be pitied, no doubt, but—it is unchristian-like to feel so, it may be unbefitting my position to say so, and yet it is the truth—we cannot forgive her just yet, because—we loved her so much once." He spoke the last sentence as if to himself, with his lips almost closed, and his face dropping on his breast.

The doctor gave a little whistle of surprise. He was not a man of refined feeling, perhaps, but he was a skilful doctor of the mind as well as of the body, and a good Catholic besides.

"She comes not of a good stock, certainly—at least, not so far as her father is concerned; and yet there may be greater sinners even than he in this world

of ours. But we have our saints, too," he added, with a sudden change of tone. "If Monsieur would only permit me to present to him one of them?"

Poor Monsieur bowed his shoulders. He seemed incapable of uttering a word more. Dr. Lévy went out, and returned almost immediately with Sœur Geneviève.

CHAPTER XXII.

CARRYING THE CROSS.

"Anfangs wollt ich faſt verzagen,
Und ich glaube ich trug es nie
Und ich habe es doch ertragen
Aber, frag mich nur nicht wie."

Heinrich Heine.

THEY buried little Gladys beside the sea at Petit Pierreport, on the day which the Church has dedicated to the memory of the Holy Innocents.

The snow fell thick and fast as they gathered round the little coffin. It fluttered down softly, and half filled up the

little grave, and changed the mourners' black robes into shining white raiment. There were not many of them. Honor, of course; she had silently entered the mourning coach, no one saying to her yea or nay; and Sœur Geneviève, who had obtained a special grace to be present; and Rosaline, and her sister, and Lili, and Hyacinthe, who cried hysterically all the time. But Honor never shed a tear. Indeed, she had not shed one since the child's death.

The poor old grief-stricken father read the service in a trembling voice, with gasps and halts for breath. Before it was quite over, another mourner was added to the little group.

This other mourner followed Honor, as she turned away at last from her sister's grave. He overtook her at the lych-gate, through which little Gladys had peered that cloudless summer day, when they had all sat together on the sands in the

sunshine, and never dreamt of the shadows that were even then creeping towards them.

"Won't you let me shake hands with you?" he said, holding out his own hand, and speaking in a voice so full of tender, manly sympathy and sorrow, that Sœur Geneviève was touched by it. But Honor took no notice. She seemed to be blind and deaf, as well as dumb, with grief.

"Won't you forgive me?" he went on. "Won't you bid me good-bye? By the next mail—" but Honor had already re-entered the mourning coach, and pulled down the blind. It was years and years before that blind was pulled up again, and they saw each other face to face once more.

Sœur Geneviève went home with Honor.

"Shall I stay with you now, *mon enfant?*" she said, shaking the snow off the girl's cloak. "Or would you rather I should come to-morrow instead?"

Honor did not answer. But Sœur Geneviève did both. She stayed with her all that long sad day: she came again the next day, and the next, and ministered to her.

But Honor took no notice. She seemed to be scarcely conscious of the Sister's presence. She would sit for hours, fingering some little frock that never now, alas, need be "let down;" or a doll, or a toy, or anything that had belonged to the child. She made no effort to rouse herself. She let her father come and go, with his piteous face and trembling speech; she left him alone to his solitary studies and dreary meals. There was no need to tell her it was wrong to mourn thus; she knew it, but she could not help it. Others might be stronger, and more able to shake off their sorrows. But then those others had never known, or loved, or lost a Gladys.

No one could mourn as she had

mourned, because none had ever lost so much. Sorrow, swift, sudden sorrow, as was this of Honor's, is apt to make the most self-forgetful of us self-absorbed—at any rate for a time.

One day Sœur Geneviève did not come.

Honor looked for her from morning till noon—from noon till sunset, thinking of her, and waiting, and wondering, but saying nothing.

When the pale, meagre, wintry light ebbed away into utter darkness, she turned to the window, from which little Gladys had so often watched the nuns of the convent opposite, trudging in and out, and stood there for a time looking out herself.

All was dark at the convent now, as well as everywhere else. But there was a lamp swinging before the door, and some light set in the chapel beyond, from

which also the sisters' voices came streaming in soft sudden waves of harmony, as they chanted their vesper hymn. Honor wondered whether Sœur Geneviève was singing among the rest, and tried to distinguish her voice.

By-and-by she turned away, then went back again. It seemed as though there were some problem in her mind, which the convent sights and sounds helped to solve.

The Sisters sang on, the lights still shone softly through the darkness. It all looked so peaceful, so serene. Surely the gentle hands that trimmed those lamps, day after day, could never have known what it was to grope about in the darkness of despair. Surely those sweet, clear voices, rising and falling with the music of the psalms, had never been hoarse with tears, or drowned in a storm of sobs. Or, if indeed such things had been, they were over now—over for ever

for those pure, passionless, saintly women, who hid their pains behind their palms, so wisely and so well. Honor dreamt of the convent that night.

"Why did you not come yesterday?" she asked of Sœur Geneviève, the next day.

"I was ill," replied the Sister, gently. "I have been very ill lately, you know. I had a great shock one day, and that made me very ill for some time."

"A great shock!" repeated Honor, looking at her wonderingly. How should a nun suffer from a shock? How should a woman who was supposed to have stripped all joy and sorrow, the rose and the thorn alike, off her life, still experience such sharp, sudden sensations? Honor was like the child who was surprised to see her sister looking "exactly the same" before and after the marriage ceremony. We are all like that child. We continually forget that the gate is

not the garden. We expect certain results, crowns of roses, garlands of forget-me-nots, with each new step in life. And yet there are hundreds of folks who enter into many new estates, but who never get beyond the gates all the days of their life.

"Yes, I had a great shock," replied Sœur Geneviève, "and that brought on brain fever. But now, thank God, I am better. He has given me a little more time wherein to pray for the soul of one who, I fear, but seldom prayed for himself."

She spoke a little wildly, and Honor looked at her again. She saw a face, not young, certainly, nor old either, but full of sudden, tremulous feeling, from the white band across her brow, to the white linen about her throat—a face with dreams in its eyes, and shadows on its cheeks, and those marks about the lips that come from repeated kissing of the

cross, and yet a face which, even in that supreme moment of adoration, somehow suddenly and strangely reminded her of Valentine.

"You did miss me then, a little, dear child," Sœur Geneviève said, in her low, vibrating voice. It was the first symptom of impatience Honor had shown.

"It is so hard to be alone and unhappy," murmured Honor, hanging her head.

"But why are you alone, then?" asked Sœur Geneviève, going straight to the point at once.

Honor did not answer. She knew there were certain things that were always said to people in trouble, and she fancied Sœur Geneviève was going to preach these things to her now. They would be horrible mocking words, stones instead of bread, dry shrivelled-up leaves instead of the living, sun-warmed flowers

that had dropped from her hand. She would have none of them. She turned her head, she would not listen.

Meanwhile, Sœur Geneviève was indeed talking on, gravely and gently.

"I do not know how it may be in *your* church, *mon enfant*, but surely, whenever you have visited any of ours, you must have seen in the 'Via Crucis,' how three times over our Blessed Saviour faints and falls beneath the weight of His Cross. Even He cannot bear it alone; it is so heavy with the burden of our sins. Some one must share it with Him. The sinless is helped by the sinful. The God-man is aided, not by God, but by man. If so it was with Him, how could it be otherwise with us? I do not tell you now to go to God; that I think you have already done, as all must do in their sorest agony, as He did Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. But I tell you to follow Him further, to tread in His foot-

steps, as you too go down the 'Via Crucis,' and let those who walk beside you help to carry your cross."

Honor was listening now.

"But no one walks beside me," she said. "I am alone now, all alone."

"And your father?" said Sœur Geneviève, simply.

"Ah, my father!" said Honor, with a start. "Ah, Sœur Geneviève, you are right. I have been selfish; mad, I think. I was dreaming of a sister's life—a sister's life has hitherto been my sole vocation, you know," she said, with such a sad little smile—"and I had almost forgotten I was also a daughter."

"*Le bon Dieu* has sent you this trouble to remind you of the truth, perhaps," said Sœur Geneviève, with gentle solemnity. "As for a religious life, it is a blessed one, no doubt, but it should never be sought merely as a refuge from the troubles of the world. Its vows

should be taken before other promises have been given. The heart that devotes itself to its service should be a pure one, unspotted by earthly passion, unstained by earthly memories—as—as——"

"As yours was, Sœur Geneviève," said Honor, filling up the pause, and wondering why the nun's voice failed her so suddenly.

"Do not ask me, child," said Sœur Geneviève, turning her head away. Then a moment later she turned round again, and added, with a slow sad smile. "Nay, you need not ask me, for I will tell you all without."

And then and there Sœur Geneviève told Honor the story of Edmée de Coulanges' life.

When it was finished, Honor's cheeks were wet with tears, at last.

"I begin to see more clearly," she said, looking up through her wet eye-

lashes. "I was wrong to think my sorrow greater than other people's. Dear Sœur Geneviève, how can you have lived through your own?"

"I have lived to share my cross," she answered, stooping down to kiss the girl's wet cheeks. "Share yours, *mon enfant;* pain is human, as joy is angelic, but sympathy, given or taken, is divine."

That evening Honor went into the next room to her father, and poured out his tea, and sat beside him afterwards, as he pulled his little table towards him, and his lamp, and his book. There were some writing materials on the same table. By-and-by she took up a pen and began to write. The father, bending over his book, looked up at her once or twice.

"Who are you writing to, my dear?" he asked, at last.

"I am writing to Stephen, papa. Would you like to see my letter?" And she held it out to her father.

Mr. Carmichael took the letter. It was written rather incoherently, and blotted here and there with those poor little crinkled spots that tell their own tale more eloquently than words. The father made out part of it.

"Forgive me," it said, "forgive me my conduct in the churchyard the other morning. Grief made me wicked for the time, but I know better now; and you will forgive me, won't you? for the child's sake, if not for mine. She was always so fond of you, Stephen——"

And then the letter went on to wish Stephen and Valentine, every blessing and happiness in their marriage and residence in India, and ended by expressing a hope that they might meet again in happier days, if not in this life, then in that to come.

Mr. Carmichael's eyes grew dim as he read.

"You are a good girl, Honor," he said, in a tremulous voice. "Can you add my wishes to yours?"

Honor obeyed him, and then the father, stretching out his hands, caught hers in his, and drew her down in a long embrace.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HARVEST AT THE VICARAGE.

"Ships that pass in the night, and speak to each other in passing,
Only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another,
Only a look, and a voice, then darkness again, and a silence."

AFTERMATH.

IN most of our lives there are seasons when the whole machinery of our existence seems to be set going all together; and after that, and before that, a long, blank, silent space, which we, in our ignorance, often deem to be wasted time.

And yet, in those spaces, sometimes, life is growing as it could not have grown in the crash and the crowd that preceded or followed them—through that silence the pendulum is beating, not fitfully, as it throbbed and vibrated when all its wheels were wound up, but steadily, faithfully keeping the time: by means of those rests music is made, a music that was not, and never could be, amid the clanging of a thousand chords, and were it not for these "waste times," as we call them, we ourselves might as well be but engines of brass and iron, battling with other engines, instead of creatures of blood and brain, formed to fight, it is true, but also to gather our laurels sometimes, and above all so to set up our standards that those who come after us may press on before us.

It is not on the soft sunshiny days, when the seed is first sown, nor yet in the wild stormy nights when the rain

pours down in torrents, and the wind howls like an unquiet spirit that the fields can ever grow white to harvest. No, indeed. The dull, dark days, the windless, starless nights, the moist, monotonous months, *these* are the times when the seed may sprout, and the buds burst forth without fear of the sun scorching up its leaves, or the wind blowing it away like chaff. And in each one of our lives there are some such seasons—for from each of us is a harvest required.

The harvest at the Vicarage was good, I think. Will you come with me, and look upon it?

See, there is the old house, and the old man himself standing under the verandah, shading his eyes and looking out towards the lane that runs down from St. Mark's Road. He is older by seven years than when you saw him last. He stoops more than he did, and his eyes are

always dim now. But Honor, and—and—someone else, are his spectacles, he says. They know, only too well—Honor does, at least—that they are his eyes.

She is standing beside him now. She is never far away from his side. She reads, and talks, and walks with him, and he sees the things she shows him. She is changed somewhat, of course. One cannot pass through the hottest seasons of one's life without some bud or other being scorched up. Out of her face something may have gone, something that was tender, and trusting, and child-like; but in its place a better thing has come—a sweet, steadfast glance, a helpful, hopeful air—a rainbow look, as it were, which proves past pain indeed, but which also speaks of present peace.

The blossoms drop that the fruit may come. People so often mistake trust for hope, and forget that the one generally dies before the other is born.

"No sign of the cab, yet, Honor?" asks the father.

"No, papa," replies Honor, shading her eyes, and looking out over the garden into the street beyond. "The train must have been late. It is past eleven already, and it is getting so hot here—too hot for you, dear, I think. Will you not go back into the drawing-room, and let me call you when I see the cab coming?"

The old man bent his head, and felt his way back into the cool, darkened drawing-room. Honor remained without, standing under the verandah, and looking down into the quiet, sunshiny garden.

There was but little change here. The bricks and mortar were somewhat more sunburnt and brown, but the mouldy plots seemed no more fertile than of old. The willow-branches still swept the grass, the honeysuckle still flaunted over the wall, and even from behind the hollyhock

hedge there seemed to be just the same sort of rustle and stir, such as little Gladys used to make, when she played about amongst the flowers years ago.

It was only a butterfly, perhaps, fluttering hither and thither, with kisses on his wings; or a cat maybe, stealing along the wall, or a bird, or a bee, or the fall of a leaf or two—it could not have been anything else, for Gladys, little Gladys, you know, was sleeping soundly under the daisies beside the sea at Pierreport . . .

It was doubtless—nothing; for Honor did not seem to hear the sound; or, at least, she took no notice of it. She stood there, listening; the chattering and chaffering growing fainter and fainter the while; for, even in England, when the sun puts forth his strength, life has a trick of becoming rather slack and sleepy.

It was St. James's Day, once more, and

just such another glorious, glowing July day, as it had been seven summers ago.

Seven summers ago! and each summer a year, except that one which had been a life-time. It was a dull landscape to look back upon, a flat, monotonous plain, totally unlike that beautiful varied picture she had been wont to paint for herself. But it was not a barren, nor a profitless one. A daily tale of duties quietly performed, "the trivial round, the common task," these, if they did not exactly satisfy her views of life, at any rate contented her. There were shadows in it too—yes alas! one terribly dark one, creeping even now, closer and closer round her dear old father. But there was sunshine also—one strange, unexpected ray—from—

"Honor, my dear, surely there is a cab stopping at the door, now? I heard the wheels. What can you have been doing not to see it?"

"So there is, papa. How quick your ears are," said Honor, looking round, and seeing a cab piled with luggage drawn up before their garden-gate. "I don't know how I came to miss seeing it. I suppose I was thinking regretfully of the position I have lost," she added, laughing, as she passed her arm through that of her father, and led him, without his being aware of the extent of her guidance, down the verandah steps, and across the grass-plot.

This was a standing joke between them. The arrival they were impatiently awaiting was that of no less a personage than a Bishop; and the said Bishop (a colonial one), being no other than the devoted Mr. Wynch, late curate of St. Mark's, and for a brief interval the occupant of a living in a manufacturing town, Honor would pretend to regret not having given her father an episcopal son-in-law.

"It was this I came to tell you at

Pierreport," he had said, that dreary winter a week or two after the Carmichaels' sad return to the Vicarage. "About the Manchester living. I wanted—am I speaking too soon?" he asked, anxiously, for the girl's eyes had filled with tears at the mention of the little French sea-port town.

"No, no;" said Honor, with a faint sob. She was thinking of the fairy tale she had listened to in those days, not of the very common-place every-day story Mr. Wynch would fain tell her at present.

"When we spoke—on this—this subject—before—you told me, you thought—your time for love had not yet come—" said the poor curate, stammering piteously. "And now——"

"And now, I think it has come and gone," in such a sad, low, steady voice, that Mr. Wynch knew that all hope for him was gone too.

And so when the Bishopric of

Polynesia was offered to him, he accepted it unhesitatingly. "I could not have taken *her* there," he said to himself. "And though I sorely feel the need of a helpmate, I shall endeavour to do my Master's Work without one." But the poor man was destined to be made happy, notwithstanding. While in this frame of mind, he came to bid farewell to his friends at the Vicarage, and there he found his fate, after all.

Miss Pincock, of the Preparatory School, was so disconsolate at the prospect of parting from "one whom she had always regarded as a dear friend," that it would have required a far stouter heart than poor Wynch's to omit proposing she should accompany him. Such a proposal was not likely to be rejected, and so when the Polynesian ship, having on board the Bishop and the Bishop's stockings and sermons, left the shores of England, it took out also a more impor-

tant personage still, namely, the Bishop's lady.

But all this time we are keeping this distinguished pair waiting outside the garden-gate, while in reality they have been most warmly welcomed back to England by the Vicar and his daughter, and also stared at mercilessly by a little child who had run across the lawn from behind the hollyhock hedge, for that express purpose, and who now stood leaning against the gate, with one hand half down her throat, and one shoulder half out of her frock.

"Who is that?" asked Mrs. Wynch, suddenly catching sight of her, the first brunt of the greetings being over.

"That is Stephen Aylmer's child," said Honor, with a grave, sweet smile. "Stephanie, Stephanie, come and shake hands with this lady."

But Stephanie declined the honour,

which, on the whole, was lucky perhaps, both her hands being somewhat black and grimy, with the exception of the fingers she had been sucking.

"She has not been with us very long, and I am afraid we have spoilt her a little," said Honor, apologetically, as the child dashed off once more, and began racing round and round the garden, to the imminent peril of the Bishop's legs. "My father is very fond of her. He calls her one of his eyes, and she really is very handy with him. But come in now and rest. I will tell you all about her another time."

It was not, however, till some days had elapsed, that Honor fulfilled her promise.

"Whilst we were at Pierreport we became acquainted with a Miss Murray, who happened to be living there at the same time," she said to Mrs. Wynch one day. "Did I ever tell you anything about her?"

"No, you did not, but the Bishop did," replied the Bishop's lady, promptly.

"Read that, then," said Honor, opening a drawer, and taking from thence a letter which she placed in her friend's hands.

They went out and sat under the old ivy-twined verandah. Honor took some work with her, a little lace-trimmed frock: it seemed just like one of those she used to sew at in the old days. The child Stephanie played about the garden. Mrs. Wynch opened the letter.

It was dated just a year ago, and was written in trembling characters, with, towards the end, short detached fragments of sentences, such as dying lips might gasp between their last quivering, hard-drawn breaths.

It was in truth a message from the dead.

"Futtehquah, August 4, 187—.

"Dear Honor,

"Have you forgotten Valentine

Murray? Can you ever forgive Valentine Aylmer? I scarcely think either possible; and yet something impels me to write to you to-day.

"It is just six years since we met, you and I, in that strange fashion in the sea at Pierreport. I scarcely thanked you then for what you did for me. I wronged you afterwards—not consciously at first, believe me, for you told me nothing, and when I guessed it was too late.

"I do not think I wronged Stephen, for I loved him. It is true I would have married anyone in those days, in order to escape from Graf von Reichenau, towards whom I entertained an unreasonable dislike. But I loved Stephen honestly and truly, and altogether independently of that; I loved him from the first moment I saw him standing at the gate of our house, smiling in your face. I love him still so perfectly, so passionately, that had I known then all I know now, I think I

would have killed myself sooner than have married him. Oh Honor, if God is love, why does He permit so much evil to be wrought, so much sorrow to be brought into the world in the name of Love?

"I wrote that yesterday. I cannot write much at a time. To-day the answer seems to be, because we give the name of love to many things that are not love at all, or at least, only self-love.

"Honor, you rescued me from drowning and you nursed me through a dangerous illness; but I do not think you ever knew what sort of life it was you saved thus twice over, nor in what manner you would be requited. You did not know that day by day I stole your love away, and night after night my father robbed him of his gold. For hours together, when you perhaps were calmly sleeping beside little Gladys, I was watching their play. I saw it, I knew it, but I could not help it. I could not save

him from my father, any more than I could save him from myself.

"Will you hate me the more for telling you this? I scarcely think so. *Tout connaître c'est tout pardonner*, and you who were so brave and strong in the old days must of necessity be tender and pitiful now. Perhaps he would be happier if he knew he was forgiven.

"He is not happy now. He never laughs as he used to laugh, nor talks as he used to talk. He works all day long, and is very tired and silent at nights. He has to work so hard, for he has paid all, or at least, a great part of my father's debts. I do not think he quite knew at first how much he was undertaking, but he has accomplished it at last. Graf von Richenau came forward and offered too (men are sometimes so generous, so forgiving even towards women who have wronged them), but Stephen would have none of his help.

He has chosen to clear his father-in-law's name by himself. 'It is a point of honour that I should do it alone,' he said.

"He has never touched a card since that terrible time. He never allows himself any amusement. His face is very calm, very grave, but there is a hopeless look about it that frightens me sometimes. He is good and kind to me and the child, but oh! Honor, he does not love me—I know he does not love me any longer.

"How or why it is, I do not know. I think he liked me once in a certain sort of way, but even that is over now. Perhaps I never really touched his heart. Perhaps—but I dare not linger thus, I have so much to say, and so little time in which to say it.

"Honor, we have a little child—five years old—whom we have called Stephanie. And, Honor, I am dying—the doctors say so now. I have known it a long time.

"Last year I was rebellious, I prayed not to die. But now I know it will be best. Now I hope that

> 'Tho' my lamp was lighted late,
> There's One will let me in.'

"When you get this I shall be dead.

"But you have promised, have you not? Is my mind wandering? Do you understand? Do I understand? I seem to have learnt so many things lately.

"This morning, at sunrise, a young married lady came to see me. She is an American by birth, but brought up in France, and lately married to an officer in the English army. She is lonely sometimes, for her husband's duties keep him much away from her. She comes to see me very often, and we have become great friends. She is a little older than I am as far as years go, but very much younger in feeling and appearance.

"She brought some photographs to show

me to-day. She is, in truth, almost as much French as American, for when she was quite a child, her father first rented, then bought, a property in the south of France, and they have lived there ever since. Among the photographs was one of her old home. It must be a beautiful place; a turretted house, with great trees growing round it. It is called Château de Coulanges, near Arles, in Provence. Somehow, as I looked at the picture, both the name and the place seemed to grow familiar to me.

"She told me the château had originally belonged to an old Royalist family, which had dwindled down to two daughters, and finally become extinct. One of the daughters she remembered having seen when she was a child. She was an invalid. She was married to an Englishman. She lived in a little cottage not very far from the château, and she died there, too, many years ago.

"But the property was sold even before the poor lady's death, for the English husband was a spendthrift and a gambler, and continually in want of money. She could not remember his name. He was not often with his wife. But, Honor, I think I have guessed it, and I fancy you will do so too.

"She knew something of the other sister too. She had been a nun, and had only died a year or two ago. An old woman who had come back to Coulanges, where she had lived in her youth, had told the family at the château a little about her. She had been the Countess' maid before she took the veil, and as her mistress had entered a convent at Pierreport, on the coast, the maid had lived in the same town till the nun died. Then she had come back to her native village to die herself.

"There was a photograph of the Countess before she became a nun, among some

other portraits my friend had brought me. It was a photograph taken from a picture. The face was oval, the eyes looked dark and deep, the hair was smoothly braided, as the fashion was years ago. Under the picture a name was painted. It was indistinct in the photograph, but I made it out at last. It was the name that was engraved on that little shabby *Livre d'Heures* we found in the old box, the name my father murmured with his dying breath—the name 'Edmée.'

"Things often look sharper, clearer, more distinct at sunset than in all the long day before. In this sunset hour of mine I seem to be seeing many things I missed before; a step here, a pathway there, finger-posts everywhere. The tangled web of life is unravelling itself before my eyes as it slips away out of my hands. There was a convent at Pierreport; there was a nun, Sœur Geneviève, I think, by name, whose shadow seemed now and then

to flit across our path. She had a pale oval face, and deep dark eyes; she was with my father at the last; I do not know, but I like to think it was Edmée.

"It is strange how one clings to life, even to such a poor, useless, wasted life as mine has been. And yet I know it is best that the cords should be loosed now. Stephen will not miss me long, the child will forget me soon. But you will be good to her, Honor, will you not? You will teach her to be a better woman than her mother has been, or could have taught her to be either, I fear.

"Stephen will send her to you. He has promised to do so—as soon as—at once. He is going back to England himself next year. His seven years' residence will then have expired. Perhaps he will not find it necessary again to return to India. Anyway he will see you, and the child—

"But I shall be dead.

"It is better so—oh! so much better, and yet the pain of dying is great—

"I had more to say,—but I cannot remember now—perhaps, to-morrow—"

And there it ended, the unfinished letter, the incomplete life.

At the bottom of the page a few abrupt words were scrawled in another hand.

"She was mistaken, poor soul. I was mistaken too. So many lives are mistakes all through. And the sunset time always comes too late. Is there no way of instilling right judgment and true purpose into a young dawning life? Honor, will you take the child? If so, write the word, and she shall be with you by Christmas time."

Mrs. Wynch's eyes were glistening, and her sallow cheeks were shining, as she folded up the letter once more.

"What else could I do?" said Honor,

throwing her arm round the child, who was now standing beside her. "She came to me on the Feast of the Holy Innocents."

"Nothing but what you have done, my dear," said the happy Bishop's lady, in a voice choked with sympathy. "And what—and what—I hope you will do."

In the furthest room in the Uffizi Palace in Florence, there hangs a circular picture of the Blessed Virgin-mother with her babe in her arms, and a book on her lap, and six smiling flower-faced angels set round about her. One angel-head, the smallest of all, is more beautiful than all. Its face is upturned and adoring, its eyes are brown and full of wonderful light, its hair is sun-lit, and rippling over with curls. The picture was painted by old Sandro Botticelli. It is his masterpiece, people say.

Before it, almost any day last winter,

you might have seen a girl standing and gazing—a tall girl, with slightly stooping shoulders, and a sweet pale face.

Sometimes she came with a little child, sometimes with an old man; oftener still with a man neither old nor young, but whose face was dark, and grave, and rather sad, and who hung about her in a strangely touching wistful way.

"It is so like her—so like her," murmured the girl one day.

"So like her, that I have painted a copy of the head for you," answered her companion gently. "I intended to be a painter once, you remember, and then I gave up that profession, as I have given up other and better things in life. *Mais on revient toujours à ses premiers amours*, as French people say, and I have a fancy—for—going back to art once more. Come and see my sketch, Honor, and tell me what you think of my chances of success. It is not well done, I know.

It has not the bright, buoyant, spiritual look which the child had—which the angel has—but still come and see, and tell me—— "

She told him with her eyes, as she walked away by his side.

And so they faded away out of sight, Stephen and Honor, and the old man, and the little child. Somewhere, I am sure, Honor is happy now; happy in herself and the source of happiness to others. The sky that hangs over us cannot always be dark and gloomy, for if it is the roof of earth, is it not also the floor of heaven? Honor's clouds have lifted at last, and the glorious sunshine of love is pouring down upon her; but still as she looks back at those dark moments of her life, she believes that even then the stars were shining. She could not see them, because her eyes were dim with tears, and her heart too heavy

to be uplifted. But there they were all the same. Perhaps, by-and-by, she will repeat this to little Stephanie. Perhaps, by-and-by, very gently and tenderly, she will tell her how a life, even of the saddest, and most spoilt by earth's sins and passions, may yet be chequered here and there by stray gleams of goodness and sweetness. But above all, she will show her how such gleams should be gathered, and brought to bear on all her actions ; for do not these lights, faint and feeble as they often are by their passage through our denser atmosphere, yet emanate from the Source of all Light?

And so Honor's life goes on, and the Virgin's hand in the picture still points to the Magnificat, and "the mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him, from one generation to the other."

THE END.

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